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## House in order

he shaming of Lord Sewel was a classic tabloid exposé. The fact that a peer of the realm (albeit one appointed by Tony Blair) was caught on camera apparently ingesting Class A drugs in the company of prostitutes is a good enough story in itself. The fact that the peer in question was chairman of the Lords privileges and conduct committee while he was doing so makes it very near to red-top nirvana. Since the publication of the story — and scores of lavish accompanying photographs - the peer's Pimlico flat has been raided by police (who battered down a door to gain access), and Lord Sewel has resigned from the House of Lords, expressing the correct and noble sentiment that he can 'best serve the House by leaving it'.

Ordinarily that would have been that. But nothing involving the issue of the House of Lords is ever ordinary. The composition, character and powers of the Upper House remain a low-level but significant sore in British politics. On the day of Lord Sewel's resignation, the new Liberal Democrat leader, Tim Farron, attempted to win political points from the affair and to stoke any popular resentment against the House by declaring that the Lord Sewel story was not just about 'one bad apple'. On the contrary, according to Mr Farron, the Sewel affair revealed a system which was 'rotten to the core'. The argument would be easier to take if senior Liberal Democrats were not currently engaged in an effort to squeeze as many recently jobless representatives of their own party as possible through the House of Lords's doors. Nevertheless, even if this were not the case. Mr Farron would still be wrong.

It seems unlikely that any very significant number of peers engage in the same relaxations and pastimes as Lord Sewel. Yes, the oddities and inconsistencies which can be pointed to in the House of Lords are significant in number. As this magazine has said before, the whole system by which this country appoints the second chamber is far from ideal. If you were to start a new Parliamentary system from scratch, you would be unlikely to put together a revising chamber which was partly hereditary, partly clerical, and significantly party donation-related. But we are not starting from scratch and are unlikely ever to be.

Besides, many of the oddities of the House are precisely its strengths. The diversity of backgrounds, interests and attitudes in the Upper House puts our increasingly identikit Lower House to shame. When

#### The fallout from this soon-to-beforgotten scoop shows an imperfect system working relatively well

those from the political left criticise the preponderance of conservative interests in the Lords, they should spend more time studying the details.

The House of Lords is today acting as a significant brake on parts of the elected government's agenda. On welfare reform, for instance, the Lords have often challenged the government's attempts to save money. Members of the Lords regularly make genuine and substantial contributions to the passing of bills. Thanks in part to their experience of the world outside Westminster politics, they often pick up things which MPs miss. It was members of the Lords who recently identified some unforeseen and potentially disastrous consequences in the government's Childcare Bill. This led to a partial climbdown by the government. Having been berated for what peers called a 'particularly egregious example' of 'vaguely worded

legislation that leaves much to the discretion of ministers', ministers have promised more solid details before the bill is returned for their inspection in the autumn. Such useful oversight goes on every day in the Lords, though it is often little noted outside the world of Westminster.

The House suffers from problems that the government could do with addressing, not least the matter of what might impolitely be termed 'dead wood'. This is not to speak of the eldest members, but of those who do not contribute or have little to contribute after a brief party political rise. As the frequent scandals of expense-claiming Lords prove, there are certainly members who appear to use the House simply to survive off the House. It remains a scandal that such figures as Baroness Uddin - briefly suspended for a sizeable fraud — should simply be allowed to return to the House after a period of suspension. Then there are the 124 members of the House of Lords who live in London, yet claim up to £300 a day for travel to the House and accommodation. Baroness Wilcox has billed the taxpayer as much as £5,700 a month for the 200-yard walk between her home in Westminster and the House. They have brought the House into more disrepute (albeit less colourfully) than Lord Sewel.

Currently on a trade mission in the Far East, the Prime Minister has responded to this week's scandal by saying that he regrets not addressing the issue of the unelected Lords in his first term. Yet the fallout from this soon-to-be-forgotten scoop shows an imperfect system working relatively well. A man was caught doing something he oughtn't to have been doing and has removed himself from public office. There may be any number of good arguments on which to base further reform of the House of Lords — but the case of Lord Sewel is not among them.



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#### **CONTRIBUTORS**

Ross Clark, whose cover story is on p. 10, is the author of *The Spectator*'s Barometer column and of two musicals: *Shot at Dawn* and *The Perfect City*.

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Christopher Fletcher is Keeper of Special Collections at the Bodleian Library. He considers the many costumes of Sir Roy Strong on p. 30.

## PORTRAIT OF THE WEEK



#### Home

man died when 1,500 migrants tried A to enter the Channel Tunnel terminal in Calais in one night. The night before, 2,000 had tried. Theresa May, the Home Secretary, spoke of spending money on fences. The Foreign Office warned travellers to the Continent via Calais that they should be prepared to return by a different route, what with migrants and French strikers. George Osborne, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, visited Paris for talks with French ministers about Britain's place in the European Union. Chris Froome won the Tour de France for the second time in three years, although some spectators threw urine at him and some even suggested that he had a little motor hidden in his bicycle. A woman from Leicester who claimed that a security guard assaulted her while she was breastfeeding in Primark was charged with intent to pervert the course of public justice. This year was beginning to look like the windiest since 1995, said the Met Office.

The British economy grew by 0.7 per cent in the second quarter of the year, compared with an increase (according to revised figures) of 0.4 per cent for the first quarter. The FTSE share index fell to its lowest level since January. Nikkei outbid its rival Axel Springer to buy the *Financial Times* for £844 million. BP recorded a loss of £4 billion in the second quarter after setting aside £4.8 billion for costs relating to the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010. The Court of Appeal ruled that an estranged grown-up daughter should receive £164,000, a third of her late mother's

estate, even though her will specified that all should go to animal charities, with which she had few connections.

ord Sewel, aged 69, not a very well-known peer, who had been appointed by Tony Blair and since 2012 had, as a crossbencher, been chairman of committees, resigned from the House of Lords after the Sun published pictures of him apparently taking cocaine and lolling about with prostitutes. Alex Salmond, the former first minister of Scotland, said: 'I think a second independence referendum is inevitable.' A Pictish fort discovered on a sea stack near Stonehaven, Aberdeenshire, was found to date from the third or fourth century. Manchester Royal Infirmary detected two suspected cases of Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome, a virus often caught from camels, which do not abound in Lancashire; but it turned out to be a false alarm.

#### Abroad

Turkey began bombing Islamic State positions in Syria a week after a bomb killed 32 people in Suruc, near the Syrian border. At the same time Turkey attacked forces of the PKK Kurdish independence movement, which is fighting the Islamic State. More than 1,000 people in Turkey suspected of links with the PKK and the Islamic State were arrested. Turkey allowed the United States to use its airbase at Incirlik. It then called a meeting of all 28 members of Nato to discuss the threat to its borders. The United States sought the establishment of a zone in Syria along the

Turkish border that would be free from Islamic State control.

ullah Omar, the Taleban leader, was reported to be dead. Pakistani police said they had shot dead Malik Ishaq, the leader of the Sunni terrorist group Lashkare-Jhangvi, during an attempt to free him from custody. A lorry bomb devastated the five-star Jazeera Palace Hotel in Mogadishu, Somalia, killing 15 people. A court in Tripoli, Libya, sentenced to death Saif al-Islam, the second son of the late dictator Muammar Gaddafi, though the condemned man is still held by a rival faction in Zintan. President Barack Obama of the United States visited Kenya, where his family comes from, and revealed that his grandfather had served as a cook in the King's African Rifles. The Boy Scouts of America lifted its ban on gay people serving as adult leaders in the organisation, though units run by Catholics and Mormons were exempt.

hinese shares continued to slide, with ✓ the Shanghai Composite falling by 8.5 per cent in one day. A factory on the outskirts of Beijing, said to have made 41,000 fake Apple iPhones, was raided by police and nine people arrested. David Cameron, the Prime Minister of Britain, said in a speech in Singapore that he wanted to stop properties in London 'being bought by people overseas through anonymous shell companies, some with plundered or laundered cash'. France accused Switzerland of using helicopters to scoop water from the Lac des Rousses in the Jura for its thirsty cows in alpine meadows over the border. **CSH** 

## DIARY Jessie Burton

The week starts well. My debut novel, The Miniaturist, is a year old. On the anniversary of its publication, my friend Patrick the bookie sends me a message to say a horse called Miniaturist is running at Sandown. I'm not normally a betting woman, but I decide to have a punt. An hour later, Miniaturist has won and I've collected 125 quid. Ain't it a glorious feeling when your horse comes in?

hings decline a little after that. After nine years not driving, I'm back behind the wheel and taking refresher lessons from Silvano, a Venetian south-east Londoner with a bullish prognosis for getting me up to speed. We pootle around in the small Japanese teapot he teaches in, and witness a motorcyclist spitting through an open car window. As we recover, Silvano tells me a tale of how a woman rammed a stiletto into the side of his friend's head as punishment for being a road hog. Why is driving so hideously transformative? But still, I want the freedom of a car, so I nod, grit my teeth — and wind the window up.

Having just completed a second novel, my suspicions have been confirmed: writing is sedentary and lonely. To combat the first problem, I sign up to an exercise class called LBT, which I wish was an acronym for Lettuce, Bacon and Tomato, but, alas, has more to do with the flabbier parts of my anatomy. I arrive, astonished to see the woman next to me, 60 if she's a day, lifting ten times the amount of weight I can manage. Steel Granny catches my eye, triumphant.

The second issue — that of sustained isolation — is a much harder nut to crack. You cannot write a novel by committee. Before I was published, my professional career was conducted in gregarious rehearsal rooms and communal city offices. These days, working from my writing shed, I regret the lunchtimes particularly, because there's no one around to play tabletennis with me in the garden. Then the phone rings: it's my editor at Picador, and as we brainstorm for two hours on how to make the second book fly, I feel less alone.



Fun lunch with a friend who works in the movies. We laugh about how, in Los Angeles, if you have a glass of wine at lunch they look at you askance, and yet everyone pops pharmaceuticals like Maltesers. We talk about social media — Twitter in particular. Old enough to have grown up without the internet, and yet young enough to be adept users of it, we're wary of what this form of instant communication is doing to our psyches. I like Twitter when everyone

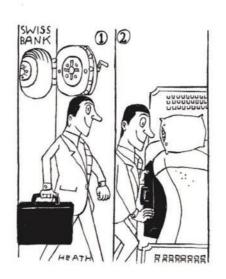
is funny and posts links to interesting articles, but this sense of being constantly on show, of investing energy into a virtual self — are we on the crest of a human revolution, or are we just mugs? Five years ago, I committed 'Facebook suicide' and never looked back. Whatever Twitter is, it's exhausting being constantly available, and I pause my account for a nice long breathe.

The writing of book two has been a psychological slog, but there are lovely benefits from *The Miniaturist* being a bestseller. I once joked to the jeweller Alex Monroe that he could miniaturise the 17th-century doll's house that featured in my novel. A year later, we are having dinner, and he places a jewellery box on the table. My breath stops in my throat. A tiny Amsterdam canal-house sits glinting silver in my hand, not much bigger than a postage stamp. It even opens up, revealing the interiors. A testament to Alex's great skill, it's a thing of beauty.

To the Pan Macmillan summer party at the RIBA. I dress in the colours of my book cover (blue and gold) and wear Alex's miniature around my neck. Revellers get drunk and indiscreet, which seems par for the course at publishing parties, but they have a lot to celebrate. I catch up with booksellers I've met along the way, all wanting to know when the next novel will be ready. It's the performer's paradox: the interest cheers me, and it also makes me feel slightly sick.

he week ends in Kent, on a sunset L balloon ride. The noise of the cold-air fans as we try to get the balloon airborne is delightfully alarming, as is the rocking of the basket as the contraption rises with one man still hanging off the end. Once in the air, and all safely in, we drink champagne out of steel flutes and watch the Weald unfold beneath us. It's so peaceful when the gas canisters aren't in use; we brush treetops and scare rabbits, and delight in the people running out of their houses to wave. The world and its noise seem far away: it's a beautiful mode of transport. I consider that, even if Silvano offered me lessons in a Ferrari. I'd rather have the balloon.

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#### POLITICS | ISABEL HARDMAN

## The agony of Labour's old-fashioned modernisers

he exhausted Labour leadership contest takes a bucket-and-spade holiday next week, with all four candidates agreeing to an uneasy truce on hustings — but probably not hostilities. It's clear everyone could do with a bit of a rest, not least because they need time to sit down, scratch their heads and ask how on earth things got to where they are.

Jeremy Corbyn, the veteran socialist, is still ahead — and not just in published polls, but in the returns all the campaigns are seeing. With private data putting him far ahead of the next candidate, Andy Burnham, even dry insiders believe there is a 50/50 chance of Corbyn winning. Labour staffers, fearing they may get the sack if he really does win, are dazed and miserable. Meanwhile, the candidate for the faction that claims it knows how to win elections, the Blairite Liz Kendall, is in last place. Whether or not Corbyn wins the leadership, one thing is clear: Blairism is finally at death's door.

Blairites tend, rightly, to mention the three elections their hero won when critics ask if they know what they're talking about. But to win a general election, you need to win your party's leadership election first. And those keeping the New Labour flame alive aren't doing so well at that.

Kendall herself talks to a membership she wishes existed: one that believes Labour should support some welfare cuts and Britain should live within its means. But when she made that last, seemingly innocuous point at a hustings in Brighton recently, she was booed. It would be a huge ask for any candidate to move the established political convictions of a party electorate during a leadership contest, and she has clearly failed.

Even Kendall's allies accept she hasn't managed to charm the membership. Initially, she seemed to be the exciting 'change' candidate, with bold policy pronouncements. But since then, an understandable attempt by her advisers to polish her rougher edges has had the counterproductive effect of making her less interesting. And some now question whether those first few weeks really were good for her campaign. 'When you say Liz had a good campaign, what you mean is she was getting good write-ups in the media,' says one supporter. 'Everything she was saying was still really upsetting the membership.'

The Blairites seem genuinely surprised by the way the party membership is acting.

It is as though they have failed to notice the way it has shifted over the past decade.

Blair never won the membership round to supporting his project for the long term. As far back as 2008, the party's middle-class, middle-aged members were starting to drift away and be replaced by younger, more metropolitan and more left-wing members. That leftward drift was then intensified during Ed Miliband's leadership, and again

More thoughtful Blairite MPs point out that even a playbook as successful as the 1997 one needs updating

after this year's election. But it seems most MPs were blissfully unaware of the changes. It was not 'moronic' of Labourites to nominate Jeremy Corbyn to 'broaden the debate', even though they didn't support him, but it is a damning indictment of the parliamentary party's understanding of the membership that they thought this would be just a wizard wheeze, rather than something that members hungered for. Labour handed membership data to the four candidates shortly after the ballot paper was finalised, and only then did they all really start to

#### FROM THE ARCHIVE

#### Out of service

From 'The new standard', The Spectator, 24 July 1915: If a change must be made at all, it is worthwhile to make a great change, to put right our mistakes, to get any happiness that a rearrangement can give us. We fear that at first a new way of life may come rather hard upon the more prosperous and highly skilled of the servant class, many of whom must be turned out of place. But, on the other hand, we hear constant complaints that servants are scarce because new careers are opening before women, and if the race of indoor manservants died out altogether we do not imagine that anyone would seriously regret the loss. If the excessive luxury in women's dress which has of late years transfigured the London shops were to be once more confined to the really rich, if necessity were to set a sumptuary fashion and the hands of fashion's clock were to go back a few decades, could such a change be widely regretted?

spectator.co.uk/atwar

understand the character of the people they were trying to woo.

Leading Blairites accept they haven't been as organised as the left of the party. A number of new left-wing Labour MPs have a paid Unite organiser co-ordinating their activities, and the unions are well-financed and savvy. The centrist Progress faction simply hasn't caught up.

Indeed, the modernisers seem rather retro, stuck in a late 1990s groove. Kendall even managed to repeat almost verbatim Tony Blair's speech about the contest in an article for the Observer last weekend. More thoughtful Blairite MPs point out that even a playbook as successful as the 1997 one does need updating. It should, for instance, recognise the rise of nationalism as being as important a sentiment as a yearning for a strong leader and trustworthy economic policies. Blair's successors need to show they have added their own wisdom to his. At the very least, they need to find a new name: the media will always tag them with the toxic 'Blairite' until they offer a new, distinct identity.

Those who are unencumbered by the misery of the leadership contest are trying to work out how Labour modernisers can make their case while their party shifts to the left and George Osborne orders his tanks into the centre ground. Chuka Umunna held meetings this week with Italy's Europe minister, Sandro Gozi, partly to take notes on Gozi's Partito Democratico and its success in winning arguments from the centre left. Umunna is also interested in the way the Tories managed to strengthen their case in opposition by using external organisations such as the Taxpayers' Alliance and the Centre for Social Justice. He feels Labour lacks that sort of institutional support, and is keen to replicate it.

In the short term, the Blairites are likely to end up at the back of the queue of people claiming they should still be listened to after the leadership contest. If Corbyn wins, they are not planning a coup against him, but instead say they will 'give him enough time to hang himself with his own rope'. In that time, the centrists need to change their whole identity and pitch to prove they understand not just how to win a leadership contest — but a general election.

#### SPECTATOR.CO.UK/COFFEEHOUSE

Our Westminster blog doesn't take holidays.

## THE SPECTATOR'S NOTES

Charles Moore

the papers call 'cocaine-fuelled orgies', one expects to find several members of the peerage present, but I must confess that until all this trouble, I had not heard of Lord Sewel, beyond a vague apprehension that he was a misprint rather than a person. I now discover that he is a Blair peer — a specially ignominious category, rather like Lloyd George's creations. But I still worry that he has 'resigned' from the House of Lords. If we continue to think that our second chamber should be unelected, it should be all but impossible to get rid of a peer once appointed. Otherwise, politics being what it is, the powerful will constantly try to assail and discredit members of the Lords in order, by frightening them, to reduce their independence. The point — contained in the word 'peer' — is that all Lords are equals and they should be able to extrude one of their number only by their own processes and only with the greatest difficulty. Clearly Lord Sewel is right to retire from the scene and make more room for his leisure activities ('hill walking, skiing; watching cricket', according to Who's Who), but the net result of his disgrace will be not a cleaner House of Lords but an even weaker one.

W e have just returned from our first cruise. Hillsdale College in Michigan — coeducational from its foundation in 1844 — is a bastion of conservative education in the United States ('Pursuing truth; defending liberty'). Its supporters come on cruises, and are lectured by people like me on improving subjects like Margaret Thatcher. We began in Lisbon, and worked our way up the Atlantic coast, visiting Oporto, St Jean de Luz, Bordeaux, the Normandy beaches. I had slightly dreaded it because of the fear of being cooped up, but I now understand why people like cruises. There is no worry about luggage, hotel bookings, bureaucracy or means of travel. We didn't have to show anyone our passports in nearly two weeks. You arrive at each new port comfortably, and you usually see it at its best — the beautiful marshes on the banks of the Garonne, the fortress



at St Malo, the great mouth of the Seine at Honfleur. The approach by water makes you understand why these places exist.

I had not been to Honfleur since 1972 when, one cold spring, a school friend and I drove our mopeds there. We were so poor that we ate in a restaurant only once in the whole trip, choosing a modest place away from the town's main tourist attractions. At the table next to us, a man eating alone ordered a bottle of cider and left having drunk only half of it. We could not believe that anyone could be so rich as to do this, and incited one another to take what remained of the bottle, but didn't dare. My companion's name was George Robinson. Today he appears in the Sunday Times Rich List, where it alleges that he earns enough each year to buy himself 20 million bottles of cider. Sadly, I have not achieved this happy state, but my wife and I ordered cider, and dashingly left half of it.

7 hile we were away, David Cameron made his strong speech about Islamist extremism, and how its religious character (however much it may distort the faith) should not be shirked. In Britain. we have had, until recently, so little direct experience of this conflict with Christendom that it is not much part of our folk memory, but in the Iberian peninsula the idea of what Mr Cameron calls an 'existential threat' is old and deep. We saw two depictions in churches in Oporto of the beheading of Franciscan friars by turbaned Moors. It was a shock to sense that what would until recently have seemed thankfully out of date. now felt contemporary. In Bento station, in the same city, handsome azuleios murals, a century old, depict the conquest of Ceuta in 1415 by King John of Portugal and his son Prince Henry the Navigator, before whom

the Moors throw down their arms and beg for mercy. One wonders how long before such a scene is removed for being Islamophobic, and how long after that before it is re-enacted, in reverse.

n board our ship, the Crystal J Serenity, every effort was made to look after us courteously. Modern standards, however, put things under some strain. As our voyage neared its end, the daily ship newspaper, Reflections, delivered to the door of our cabin ('stateroom'), said: 'All guests are cordially invited to join Captain Birger J. Vorland and Crystal Society Hostess Isabell Wagner in the Palm Court at 7:45 p.m. While the Captain is pleased to meet you, he and the other staff receiving you refrain from shaking hands in order to provide the most effective preventative sanitary measures.'

We return to find the Financial Times sold to Japanese and Jeremy Corbyn threatening to take over the Labour party. The press keep referring to the FT as 'the Pink 'Un'. It was never called that. The Pink 'Un's formal name was the Sporting Times, and the paper existed from 1865 to 1932. Its annuals were actually called the Pink 'Un. In addition to racing, it carried gossip, theatre coverage and, unlike the FT, general merriment. It was the Pink 'Un that printed the famous obituary of English cricket which gave rise to the joke behind the Ashes.

r Corbyn has a beard. If he becomes leader, he will be the first bearded leader of any main party since Keir Hardie. The beard as a fashion item is now back, generally in shaped and even waxed form. But Mr Corbyn's one owes nothing to fashion. It is a 1960s political beard, already obsolete when he first brought it into the House of Commons in 1983. Like Lord Hailsham who, as Mrs Thatcher's Lord Chancellor, continued to wear a bowler hat long after it had disappeared from everything but hunt puppy shows. Orange parades and A Clockwork Orange, Mr Corbyn is undaunted by the passage of time. I must try not to get sentimental about him.

## Osborne rules

The Chancellor has Westminster in his grip

#### **ROSS CLARK**

gainst the heavy artillery fire of the Labour leadership battle, the struggle of the Conservative leadership contest goes almost undetected outside Westminster. It is no less intense, even though the Conservatives will not elect a new leader for at least three years. After a week of the parliamentary recess, there is no question about who is winning. This week, for the first time, George Osborne overtook Boris Johnson as William Hill's favourite.

Not so long ago, Osborne was a mere limpet on David Cameron's wetsuit, clinging on thanks to the patronage of his boss. Booed at the 2012 Paralympics while Johnson was cheered, the Chancellor seemed too tainted by the charge

of austerity to contemplate ever becoming Prime Minister. His budget that year had unravelled, with hasty backpedalling on the pasty tax and VAT on static caravans, which, combined with the lowering of the upper rate of income tax to 45 per cent, had played to Osborne's weakness: that he looks and sounds like a posh kid without Cameron's paternalistic regard for the poor.

Yet now Osborne sits like an octopus over Westminster, his legs and tentacles reaching into every corner of government and the Conservative party. Another limb reached the Champs-Élysées last Sunday when, in his role as Cameron's deputy, he presented Chris Froome with the winner's trophy for the Tour de France.

Osborne is on a charm offensive. While Cameron rose to power despite a cold and distant attitude towards his backbenchers, the Chancellor has been assiduously courting new MPs since the election. Early on, they were invited for sandwiches at the Treasury. At one event, according to a new MP, he went around the room boasting of how many of his former advisers or political private secretaries had become ministers in the post-election reshuffle — friends such as Amber Rudd, the climate change secretary, Sam Gyimah, the childcare minister, and Greg Hands, now number two in the Treasury, Handwritten notes praising MPs on their Commons speeches followed, as well as an invitation for some to a barbecue at Dorneywood, the Chancellor's country residence.

Like Gordon Brown before him, Osborne excels at using the power of the Treasury to



consolidate his strength. His allies have a knack of picking up infrastructure projects. The constituencies of Liz Truss, in South West Norfolk, and Matt Hancock, in West Suffolk, both benefited from one of the few road projects to escape the axe in the last Parliament: the building of a dual carriageway from the A11 to Thetford. Priti Patel's Witham seat is expected to undergo flood defence works, in spite of a miserly national budget. Harriet Baldwin, in West Worcestershire, recently boasted of having won £5 million to put right what she said was the historic underfunding of the county's schools — sorted out with a

#### Like Gordon Brown, Osborne excels at using the power of the Treasury to consolidate his strength

cheque from Gyimah. Osborne has turned meetings of the Treasury support group — a band of backbenchers recruited to support the Chancellor in debates — into mini electioneering rallies. Before the election, 20 regularly attended; now 50 do, attracted by the promise of the Chancellor's patronage. One MP happened to mention that he was struggling to find a minister willing to open a factory in his constituency. Osborne, who spent much of the election campaign in a hiviz vest, was quick to oblige.

Those who cross Osborne find themselves outmanoeuvred or isolated. Nadine Dorries lost the party whip in November 2012, ostensibly because she decided to go on reality TV, but insiders knew her real mistake had been to infuriate Osborne by describing him and David Cameron as 'two

posh boys who don't know the price of milk'. Andrea Leadsom, billed by anyone who'd met her as a rising star in the party, was repeatedly left out of reshuffles because she had the temerity to question Osborne's handling of the Libor scandal in 2012. She was eventually made economic secretary to the Treasury — Tories suggested this was a case of Osborne keeping his enemies closer — and is now minister of state for the rather lesser Department of Energy and Climate Change.

There is also the grubby and ongoing business of belittling Boris Johnson, who until 7 May looked like a Conservative king across the water. The defining moment in the change of fortunes between Osborne and Johnson came in

the Budget when the Chancellor promised money to repair a second world war RAF command centre in Boris's constituency. It was a minor award, which hardly deserved inclusion in the Budget speech, but it rapidly became clear why it had, as Osborne thanked the local MP for bringing to his attention 'the dilapidated state of his campaign bunker' and added that it was a monument to the 'days when aeroplanes flew freely over west London'.

The attack was two-pronged: as well as a subtle hint that Osborne will ensure that the government will approve a third Heathrow runway against Boris's wishes, it repeated an invitation to backbench MPs which the Chancellor had made in private: if you need a little financial help with something in your constituency, come and see me, George'll fix it.

Meanwhile, Theresa May has launched a Kill Boris operation of her own, turning her rejection of the use of water cannon on London streets into a piece of Commons theatre. May and Osborne have a common cause in turning backbench MPs against the Mayor of London. Johnson has huge appeal among Tory grassroots but, under the rules of the Conservative leadership election, ordinary party members will only have two candidates to choose from, selected for them by MPs. Osborne's chances of succeeding to the leadership could depend on Boris's name being omitted in favour of May.

It's hard not to be impressed by Osborne's Machiavellian skill, or the way in which, through a sophisticated network of political and journalist friends, he dominates the Westminster scene.

Osborne the statesman is not nearly as impressive. His success hinges on the fate of the British economy. The turnaround in his fortunes can be traced to the spring of 2013 when for weeks Britain seemed poised on the edge of a triple-dip recession. Ed Balls would have had a field day, yet when the data came through it showed that not only had there been no triple dip, but revisions of earlier data showed there had been no double dip either. Better still, by the end of the year Britain had the fastest-growing economy in the G8. It was a crushing blow to Labour's line of attack: that Austerity Osborne had stalled the recovery.

Defying Balls, along with a host of economists who wrongly believed that austerity would lead to depression, will always be Osborne's crowning achievement as Chancellor — on a par with Thatcher's defiance of the 364 economists who wrote to the *Times* in 1981 imploring her to abandon monetarism.

n some counts, however, Osborne's recovery has been less golden than is made out. He didn't just promise to regrow the economy, he promised to rebalance it, away from the City. On this, he has failed. Between 2007 and 2012, the financial sector was static, worth £119 billion at current prices. But manufacturing hardly grew either, from £143 billion to £146 billion.

This week's figures show manufacturing going into reverse. The jobs miracle has stalled, for the moment at least, with unemployment growing by 15,000 to 1.85 million in July. The trade gap is growing ever wider. In the three months to April, the UK imported £7.2 billion more goods and services than it exported.

Economic recovery has been far too reliant on an already bloated housing market, which Osborne stoked with his Help to Buy scheme, despite warnings that subsidising homebuyers without increasing supply of housing was bound to be inflationary.

Many cheered the rise in the inheritance-tax threshold without stopping to work out the inevitable consequence of an extra inheritance allowance, which is linked to property only. Osborne has created a huge incentive for older people to stay in homes that are too large for them, or even to upsize in retirement — inflating house prices further. This was a point observed by the Treasury itself in a leaked document written in March.

Osborne's big idea is the Northern Powerhouse, a shimmering multi-centred city which is supposed to do for the north what London has done for the south. This sounds good but it is in danger of becoming like Cameron's Big Society: no one is quite sure of what it is supposed to consist.

Osborne is much lauded for his 'big tent' politics; his hogging of the centre ground. His summer budget was widely seen as a tri-

umph: a successful bid to occupy the political space vacated by Labour as it pushes itself to the left. Reporting of the budget, as the Chancellor must have intended, revolved around the lifting of the national minimum wage, which Osborne rechristened the national living wage. The move allowed him to position himself as the friend of working people and Labour, by contrast, as the party of the benefit-claiming classes. Yet closer inspection shows a budget which will leave many working people on low incomes worse off. Astonishingly, Labour has failed to pick up on this.

Political honeymoons tend to be short. It is remarkable enough that Osborne is having one at all, given that he has been Chancellor for five years. But sooner or later, Labour will wrestle the Osborne octopus and begin, especially, to prise his suckers from the claim of being a friend of the working poor.

History is on Osborne's side: a long list of chancellors have moved next door to No. 10. By contrast, there is no recent history of mavericks such as Boris Johnson becoming Prime Minister unless one likens him — fairly improbably — to Churchill. Yet the chancellors of the past half-century who went on to become prime ministers — Jim Callaghan, John Major and Gordon Brown - suffered relatively miserable premierships. In the case of the latter two, this was in large part because of mistakes they made in the Treasury: John Major, as chief secretary, pressing for membership of the exchange rate mechanism, and Gordon Brown spending too much money in the hubristic belief that he had abolished boom-and-bust.

Osborne will find himself no less a prisoner of his time at No. 11. If he can reach 2020 without another economic crisis, he will have been luckier than Brown. There is a blond figure on the back benches who may be secretly hoping that the good times do not last quite that long.



'Some embarrassing photos have emerged of us with a peer of the realm.'

#### **BAROMETER**

#### Safe house

Lord Sewel is unique in leaving the House of Lords in disgrace. Until the House of Lords Reform Act 2014, only a treason conviction earned you expulsion from the House of Lords, and that only since 1870. At least two peers have been executed for treason, Simon Fraser, 11th Lord Lovat, and William Maxwell, 5th Earl Nithsdale, but both well before this date.

— Thanks to the 2014 Act it is now possible to have your Lords membership terminated on two grounds: being jailed for a criminal offence with a sentence of more than one year, or failing to turn up for a whole session. But you cannot be ejected for non-attendance if prevented from attending through disqualification: by, say, an 11-month jail sentence.

#### Laundry list

David Cameron promised to crack down on gangs laundering money through London property. How much is laundered through the UK each year? Officials say... £15bn: Serious Organised Crime Agency £23-£57bn: Financial Services Authority, now defunct, 2013

£20-£40bn via gangs, plus £10bn through banks, lawyers, accountants, etc: Financial Conduct Authority, 2013

#### Sporting highs

Chris Froome won the Tour de France, denying any involvement with performance-enhancing drugs. Which sports have the biggest drugs problem?

 % tests positive

 Baseball/softball (2007)
 7.8%

 Cycling (2004)
 4.6%

 Curling (2007)
 4.1%

 Boxing (2003)
 3.7%

 Triathlon (2005)
 3.4%

 Archery (2005)
 2.9%

 Source: UK Anti-Doping

#### Smart money

A study found that five-year-olds with low academic achievement from wealthy families were more likely to be high earners aged 42 than poor children of high ability. Are IQ and income linked? In his 1972 study *Inequality*, Christopher Jencks found a correlation of **0.31** between IQ at the age of eight and income at the age of 43.1 is a perfect correlation and zero is total randomness. In 2007 Jay Zagorsky of Ohio State University found that Americans with an IQ of 130 earned **\$12,000** more a year than those with an IQ of 100. Those with an IQ of 120 had assets averaging \$128,000 while those with an IQ of 100 had assets worth \$58,000.

## Despair springs eternal

The left is always eager to be told that capitalism's final crisis is upon us – and it is always disappointed

#### DOUGLAS MURRAY

he literary emissions of the left are hardly ever enjoyable, but they can be instructive. Last year Thomas Piketty's Capital in the 21st Century became one of the biggest-selling political books of the year. Like a thousand-page Soviet report on tractor production, it hardly seemed intended to be read. The point of its success was that it could be said to 'prove' the left's argument. They could then hit their opponents over the head with it and move to the next stage. Last year they questioned some premises of capitalism and now Paul Mason, the economics editor of Channel 4 News (and Spectator diarist), is here to say that capitalism is in fact over.

The central argument of his new book *Postcapitalism* is that 'neoliberalism' — which he characterises as an entity designed to destroy the working class and the welfare state — has reached the limits of its capacity to adapt. In gathering evidence for his argument, the reporter travels from Moldova to America by way of Greece. And if anybody feels concern about his central claim, then they can take comfort in his certainty that whatever comes next will be fairer and more just. If anybody thinks they have read all that before, it is because they have. For decades.

At least since the 19th century, whole libraries have grown up making the claim that capitalism has had its day. Most of these works have been written in a spirit of hopefulness that has come to nothing. And not just because they are so grudging about the fact that capitalism has raised more people out of poverty than any other financial system in history. Nor just because they remain deaf to the beautiful irony that capitalism remains the only financial system in history so benevolent that it makes even its most feverish critics rich.

The unspoken source of the problems — and the cause of the prolific book production — is that if capitalism is such a dreadful system, why has it kept trumping all their alternatives? A whole left-wing literature of consolation and self-reassurance has tried to speak to this conundrum. And always, but always, there is the hope that if we dive back into the prophet's work we might find the missing clue. Which is why there is always a chapter, as there is in Mason's book, asking 'Was Marx right?'

Yet from Marx to Mason, the most striking thing about this seam of literature is that it always underestimates its opponents while overestimating its own increasingly byzantine theories. It is perhaps forgivable that Mason's road map for what happens next is vaguer than his 'how we got here' portion. But it is illustrative that this puts so much emphasis on what has fuzzily become known as 'the sharing economy'. This is the idea that entities like Airbnb — a website on which you can rent out rooms or whole homes - will change the way in which we make transactions, making things more personable and peer-to-peer. The left are putting a lot of hope in it. They shouldn't.

I have a friend who lets her spare room

Paul Mason and his readers prefer apocalypse to boom, as long as the apocalypse proves them right

on Airbnb. Every week she checks the price of hotels in her area and offers her spare room for a few pounds less. There is nothing wrong with this, but it is not 'sharing': it is simply undercutting existing service providers. Entities that are successful at this will eventually float on the stock market and make their inventors rich. In the meantime, some of us will get cheaper accommodation as hotels and Airbnb compete, while some of us will remain loyal to places we just like.



'Giving people money is very popular with people we give money to.'

But all this is not a demonstration that capitalism has lost its capacity to adapt, rather that it is still adapting — as it always has done — in new and innovative ways.

However, Mason and his readers whom I met at a Guardian discussion we did together last week - do not want to hear much of this. They prefer apocalypse to boom, so long as the apocalypse proves them right. And there are very few concessions to reality along the way. So whereas only a maniac from the right would pretend that the behaviour of certain banks did not contribute to the present global downturn, a diminishing number of figures on the left seem willing to concede that excessive personal or national debt (with very little to show for its accumulation) were another cause of the same. Bad banks driven by bad capitalism are the only causes of our

Then there is Greece. Mason's reputation has deservedly grown in recent months through his interesting and animated reports from the epicentre. But his diagnosis is all wrong. He blames the Greek crisis on neoliberalism and capitalism as a whole, while seeming oddly unbothered by Greek corruption or the faulty construction of the EU and eurozone as causal factors. This is much like reporting a drink-driving accident but blaming the crash on the invention of automobiles.

Elsewhere, we stumble on the now traditional left-wing bogeymen. So we read of places where labour can be got for free, 'as in the American prison system or Nazi death camps'. And later Mason writes, 'In Gaza, in August 2014, I spent ten days in a community being systematically destroyed by drone strikes, shelling and sniper fire.' Nothing about Hamas rocket-fire or any context about a long-running war. Instead he describes this apparently naked aggression as an example of 'how ruthlessly the elite will react' to defend modern capitalism. But why would anyone bomb Gaza to do that? As well as holding many of the other worst views in the world, are Hamas also in possession of a particularly devastating critique of late capitalism?

Oddly enough, the recent batch of leftwing doom and conspiracy books, from those of Russell Brand and Owen Jones to the more serious and informed Mason, point to a unified worldview. This sees human beings in democracies not as people with free will and unimaginable potential, but as inanimate beings to whom things are done. If you have over-borrowed, then some mean lender made you borrow. If you are an individual, a loan company will have been to blame; if you are a nation, then the fault is Germany's.

After digesting all these tomes which keep getting ahead of their own arguments, it seems very much to be the politics of the left, rather than capitalism, which are coming to the end of their ability to adapt.

#### **ROD LIDDLE**

## If Corbyn becomes PM, I'm blaming you lot



magine, for a moment, the following scenario. In 2016 Britain votes nar-L rowly to remain within the European Union, despite the Prime Minister having achieved little in attempting to renegotiate the terms of our membership. The 'out' campaign — which was no longer led by a marginal party, Ukip, but by the majority of the parliamentary Labour party, under its new leader Jeremy Corbyn — came mightily close to securing our withdrawal, and thus, as it is put by proponents, our independence. Subsequently, Labour receives the same sort of bounce in the opinion polls as the SNP enjoyed following the equally close independence referendum in Scotland — helped by a continuing crisis in the eurozone and extravagant demands for the UK to do a bit more bailing out and take still more of the sub-Saharan immigrants who now constitute about 92 per cent of the population of Calais.

A year later, an infuriated British public sees its energy bills rise by three times the rate of inflation; the mood in favour of nationalising the utilities, as Corbyn demands, stands at 61 per cent in the latest opinion polls. In 2019 there is a government scandal — something perhaps involving drugs, whores and money — and yet the Conservatives are still just about ahead as the 2020 election campaign gets underway.

But only just about. About as just about ahead as they were in 2015, maybe a little less. In the end, the result is very similar to 2015, except that the government loses perhaps 20 or so seats on a 0.8 per cent swing. Labour gains 25, the SNP loses five. There was a strong Ukip vote in the south, especially the south-west, but its vote in the north collapsed.

As a consequence, Jeremy Corbyn is the Prime Minister of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (although probably not that latter bit for much longer) and will rule with his Deputy Prime Minister, the hugely likeable SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon. Our Foreign Secretary is Lord Salmond of Linlithgow. 'I supported Corbyn in his leadership bid because I wished there to be a serious debate in the party about tackling our budget deficit. I didn't expect *this* to happen,' says a plainly appalled Frank Field on the 10 May 2020

edition of the *Today* programme. 'Christ help us all,' he concludes.

You lot, or many of you lot, are too busy tied up with accountants sorting out your financial arrangements, or emigrating to the Czech Republic (top tax rate 15 per cent), to have heard Mr Field's lengthy apologia for having supported Jezza. Because just around the corner is Chancellor Diane Abbott's first budget, and the likely introduction of a top rate of income tax of 60 per cent — Corbyn yearns for 75 per cent, but bear with us, we will have to get there in stages, he tells his impatient, adolescent and plainly mentally ill supporters.

At Buckingham Palace, meanwhile, the Queen is trying to work out the menu place

Be careful what you wish for, please, for all our sakes. This scenario I've outlined is not particularly outlandish

settings for the upcoming dinner in honour of Khaled Mashal, the leader of Hamas. Probably a vegetarian starter and halal chicken is the safest bet — and of course the Queen herself should be appropriately veiled. She will also have to prepare a menu for the forthcoming visit of various Irish people who have tried, in the past and with some success, to murder members of her family. Colcannon potatoes, I would reckon. And bacon. Don't get the two menus confused, now.

Be careful what you wish for, please — for all of our sakes. The scenario I outlined above is not particularly outlandish — indeed, most of it is more likely to happen than not happen. I accept that it gets a bit surreal towards the end, but hell — with a Corbyn premier-



'Three units of pinot grigio, Max.'

ship it will be surreal, believe me. If you've never tried LSD, a Corbyn government would be a fairly decent simulacrum of the drug, especially the bit where you have to come down and suffer recurring flashbacks, like the one where you're in Rampton and all of your fellow patients, and the nurses, are actually fish.

Those of you who wish for Mr Corbyn to become leader of the Labour party do so for one of three reasons: a) you think he would be a bloody brilliant Prime Minister, b) you want there to be a 'proper debate' in the Labour party (à la Frank Field, Margaret Beckett etc) or c) you are Tories and wish — as my colleague Toby Young put it — to consign Labour to electoral oblivion. All three reasons are patently absurd, but at least option a) has a certain berserk nobility to it. The other two are self-indulgent and a consequence of either hubris or schadenfreude.

Tory voters have been gulled by the opinion polls and the unexpected outright victory for Mr Cameron back in May, I think. A victory it was indeed, but it was not a victory by very much at all, when push comes to shove. In electoral terms we came within a whisker of a Miliband-SNP alliance government, and our justifiable gratitude at being spared such an appalling eventuality should not be allowed to spiral into a spurious feeling of impregnability. Because spurious it is — this is not 1982, even if, for Labour party members like myself, those similarities seem to abound. For a start, the Conservative party will not come anywhere close to achieving 44 per cent of the vote in 2020, as it did back then; knock 10 per cent off and you might be nearer the truth. The electoral map is more fissiparous, volatile; the voters less reliable in what one might reasonably expect them to do. A Corbyn victory in 2020 is far more likely, for all of these reasons, than a Michael Foot victory was in 1983.

You have to understand that it does not matter that he is mad, or at the least terminally deluded; events may ensure that such a judgment is forgotten. The Labour party will not be consigned to electoral oblivion if Corbyn becomes its leader. But the country will be consigned to oblivion if, with the slenderest tweaking of the national mood, he becomes Prime Minister.

## 'The smugglers don't care'

On a Greek beach, watching migrants' dinghies arrive from Turkey

PAUL WOOD

Lesbos
young woman in a headscarf stumbled over some rocks and onto the beach. She stood there, rigid, stunned, then burst into tears. A grandmotherly German tourist hugged her. 'It's over now, you're safe,' she said. 'You're in Europe.'

A Burmese man from the same boat looked around anxiously and asked: 'Will the police here beat us?' It was after dawn on the Greek island of Lesbos, the sun glinting off the turquoise sea, an idyllic holiday-brochure landscape of hills with whitewashed houses. But the Turkish coast is so close that you can see it, and so this tiny island has become the front line in Europe's migration crisis. Hundreds of people arrive here every day in rubber dinghies. The UN says more than 185,000 illegal migrants have come to Europe by sea this year, 100,000 of them entering Greece, half of those making landfall on Lesbos.

We watched another dinghy come in. People waded ashore; the last of them punctured the boat to sink it, as instructed by the smugglers: this is a one-way trip, the boat a disposable asset for the Turkish mafias behind this operation. A Greek fisherman rushed into the water to retrieve the valuable outboard motor and the refugees walked up the beach, taking their first shaky steps on European soil. They were met by a British expat, Eric Kempson, who handed out water, croissants, wet-wipes and dry clothes. Originally from Windsor, he has lived on the island for 16 years, making a living carving olive-wood knick-knacks for the tourists. With his ponytail, he made for an unlikely Mother Teresa, but his house looks out to sea and he has been moved by what he witnessed there.

'The currents are very strong,' he told me. 'When we get a swell up, it can be vicious.' One day, the waves were so high that even the fishing boats did not venture out but still the smugglers sent five boats across. The fifth did not make it. It folded in half about a mile out. 'The front end of the boat went up in the air and the back end went up in the air... with a few people left in the middle. Then everyone was in the water. You could see the splashing — these people can't swim. I watched for 20 minutes. There was nothing we could do.' A helicopter went out looking for survivors but found none. 'I've watched those people drown,' he said, choking up. 'That last boat was mainly women and children.'

The refugees represented a cross-section of the world's conflicts; Syrians and Iraqis, Afghans and Somalis. There were economic migrants, too. My Syrian friend Yilmaz had arrived on Eric's beach the day before, and he told me there were Algerians and Moroccans in the holding centre with him, all pretending to be Syrians to get refugee status. 'They have even practised their Syrian accent,' he said. Yilmaz painted a fascinating picture of the smuggling operation, as seen from the inside. A 24-year-old student with dreadlocks, he arrived on Lesbos with a group of 20 Syrians. Most had fled the war, of course — Yilmaz was even imprisoned by Isis - but they had been in Turkey, some for years. There was a barber, a musician, a labourer — they could not go back to Syria and none could find decently paid jobs in Turkey, so they were making new lives in Europe.

We sat on a quayside crowded with sleeping refugees, tourists stepping gingerly around them. His journey had started with an Arabic Facebook group called 'Wanderers Bus-stop'. For its 40,000 members, it is a clearing house for people-smugglers and migrants. 'It has everything about how to go to Europe,' said Yilmaz, 'from the first step to the last.' Yilmaz got a telephone number off the page and went to meet a man on 'smugglers' street' in a small town on Turkey's Izmir coast, the one just visible from Lesbos. From there, his group of 20 was split up into taxis and taken late at night to the edge of a forest. They headed for a torch signalling from the trees and they found themselves among 150



'Are you sure you want to join the Labour party?'

people. The smugglers tried to force Yilmaz into a tiny launch with 67 people on board. There was room for perhaps a dozen people to fit comfortably. He and his friends thought they would drown so they jumped out, insisting on waiting for another boat. 'The smugglers don't care what happens — they just put you on the boat and say: go,' said Yilmaz. 'It's easy money for them.'

He and each of his friends were charged \$900 each — sometimes the cost of the ticket is \$1,000. Money-changing offices in Turkey provide shady escrow accounts. The migrants pay the cash to the money-changer, who gives them a code word. Once in Greece, they phone the smuggler — Yilmaz was told to say 'Coca-Cola' — and he collects his fee. There were 45 people on the boat Yilmaz finally took — \$35,000–40,000 in takings after the cost of the boat and outboard motor.

On a busy day, a dozen such boats can arrive in Lesbos from Izmir. The profits are immense. People-smuggling may well be more lucrative than smuggling drugs, and a lot less risky. No wonder the Greek authorities can't stop the refugees from coming.

On Lesbos, the boats' arrival is a tourist attraction, people gathering on the road above the beach to watch. 'Just fack off, you dirty people, roo-nin' our 'oliday,' shouted a peroxide blonde woman with an Essex accent as a group of migrants struggled over the lip of the hill onto the road. Moments later, though, they were handed bottles of water by Bob, a holidaying former British Army sergeant with a regimental tattoo on his forearm.

The locals are as divided as the tourists. Eric Kempson told me that one hotel-owner was quietly putting up refugees and feeding them. But Eric has also had his tyres slashed by members of Golden Dawn, the Greek farright party. The police had even threatened to arrest him for handing out supplies on the beach. 'People blame us for the problem,' he said. 'They say if you didn't help them, they wouldn't come. This is ridiculous. They're not coming because someone's handing them a cheese sandwich when they get here.' He thought the European Union should put on ferries to stop migrants from drowning.

Greek officials and policemen I spoke to seemed sympathetic to the refugees — but also keen to get rid of them. The migrants take a ferry to Athens. There, according to Yilmaz, there is a thriving market in forged documents. The going rate for a British passport is  $\{2,500,$  he said. 'The documents are from Iraqis who are resident in the UK. They change the photo.'

After 28 days on the road, Yilmaz triumphantly posted a Facebook picture of himself in the German town of Osnabrück. His dream is to make it to London. England is more difficult to reach than any other part of Europe, he told me. But the English Channel is not an insurmountable obstacle.

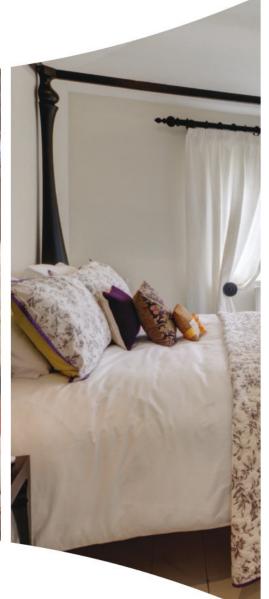
Paul Wood is a BBC correspondent.

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#### **ANCIENT AND MODERN**

#### Jeremy Corbyn's world



Jeremy Corbyn

says he is very excited about his campaign to become Labour leader because lots of young people are becoming involved in it, which 'must be a good thing'. Aristotle (384–322 BC) would have his doubts.

In his Art of Rhetoric, Aristotle pinpoints the sorts of thing that can be said on a large number of topics which will encourage your audience to agree with you. One such topic is the character of the young.

In general, he says, the young are pleasure-loving, impulsive and optimistic. Of the desires of the body, he says, they are keenest on sex, and powerless against its demands. But since they are keen rather than determined, their lust is quickly satisfied. They are impulsive, hottempered and follow it up with action. Because being admired is very important to them, they cannot bear to be belittled, and get angry if they think they have been wronged.

They are not especially interested in money, because they have never needed it; they are not cynical, never having experienced much wickedness; they are naive, never having been deceived very often; and optimistic, never having experienced much in the way of failure.

For the most part, Aristotle continues, they live in hope, 'since hope is for the future, but remembrance for what has passed, and at the beginning of life, the past is short but the future long'. So because they easily hope, they are easily deceived, but they are more courageous too: for their passion prevents them fearing, while their hope inspires them with confidence. They also prefer to do what is fine rather than what is in their interest, since they live by character rather than calculation, and so are inexperienced in making judgements to their own advantage. Thinking they know everything, they are obstinate; but they are inclined to pity because they judge others as they do themselves and assume all men are honest.

All rather like the charming Mr Corbyn himself. If only the world of politics were so innocent.

- Peter Jones

## Asking too much

Charities' fundraising practices are out of control

#### **MELISSA KITE**

Jack Nicholson's moving portrayal of a lonely old man in *About Schmidt* convinced me that I should sponsor a child. You may remember the scene at the end: he gets a letter from a nun in the Tanzanian village where a little boy has been receiving his largesse and realises that his life has not been meaningless. He has made a difference to somebody.

I wept buckets as the credits rolled and not long afterwards signed up to a sponsor-ship programme with a leading charity in the hope that I too could make life better for one person. And maybe I did. I was allocated a child in Armenia. I pledged an embarrassingly low sum of money, really, when you consider how needy half the world is, and how much we in the West lavish on luxuries and incidentals. But it was what I could budget for on a monthly basis at the time.

When the young boy sent me his first letter he told me he was a Chelsea fan, so I wrote back telling him that I was too and sent a few small items in a package from the Chelsea FC gift shop on the Fulham Road. He never mentioned the gift in subsequent letters, all written on the same formal notelets bearing the charity's emblem. But I like to think he might have got it.

I gave the matter less thought over time and when the same standard updates came each year I only glanced through them.

Earlier this year, I received the annual letter saying 'It's your sponsored child's birthday soon, please sign this card' — a card bearing puzzle games. It occurred to me that he had to be getting a bit old for this. I looked up his date of birth and he was about to turn 18. So I rang the charity and asked whether they had made a mistake and should be informing me that my stint had come to an end. But the call centre was adamant that the arrangement should continue. When I asked what the boy was doing that still required support, they said the field centre was hard to get word back from. I told them I would be grateful if they could try because, quite honestly, if this were my own son I wouldn't be offering to support him financially for very much longer.

A few weeks later, I rang again and asked if they had found anything out. I was told that my sponsored child was 'still in education'. Fine, I said. Do we know what he is studying? No. Do we know how long he was going to be studying? No. The point was, they said, it was

very important that my support did not dry up when the child turned 18 because if it did then he could get into gangs or drugs.

I put the phone down feeling pretty certain that I could never, ever cancel this direct debit. In a few years, my 'sponsored child' may be in London doing loft conversions or running a chain of restaurants and I will still be sending money to Armenia in his name, because there is no way I can cut him off.

I suspect I am not alone. We may start supporting charities with warm feelings, but how many of us end up feeling ever so slightly manipulated as the guilt trip goes on and on? In May, 92-year-old Olive Cooke killed herself after being pestered by dozens of organisations. She had somewhere in excess of 27 direct debits to charities and was getting 180 letters a month asking her to sign up to more. While her family have insisted that she did not kill herself directly through pressure from any particular charity, she was exhausted and

#### We are expected to accept that charity greed is good. But won't it lead to a backlash?

depressed. She had discovered that if you sign up to one good cause, you trigger an cascade of requests from others, who, thanks to data sharing, have your contact details.

You may avoid the phone calls telling you about starving children and abused animals by unplugging your landline. But you may not be able to dodge the door-knocking by marketing firms employed by charities who are on commission for every direct debit they get someone to sign. Last year, a guy knocked my door announcing he was from Battersea Dogs' Home. He said they needed funds because dogs were being tortured, so would I sign a direct debit.

I refused, but later discovered that my elderly neighbour had signed. I rang Battersea and they hadn't heard of any tortured dogs. They blamed a private firm that was doing their door-knocking, and promised to contact those who had signed direct debits in my street. Charities use every trick to get your contact details, including 'list brokers' who obtain data if you've purchased something through mail order and did not tick the box stating you do not wish your details passed to a third party. And charities share data with other charities.

It doesn't help foster feelings of goodwill that in tandem with sales techniques reminiscent of the worst corporate excesses of the 1980s and 1990s, charity chiefs are paid bigger salaries than some City boys. A Sun investigation recently found that Peter Wanless of the NSPCC, a charity supported by Olive Cooke, was earning £162,000 a year; Amnesty International secretary general Salil Shetty was on £200,000; Age UK chief executive Tom Wright earned £180,000. The RSPCA — whose website home page is one huge advert in large print screaming 'Help Save Animals Today Donate Now' — paid its last chief executive, Gavin Grant, £160,000 (a new one is yet to be appointed).

The charities are only able to get away with it because they have convinced the public that when money-making is for a good cause, rather than a commercial enterprise, we should turn a blind eye to exactly how the cash is raised and who benefits. In other words, we are expected to accept that charity greed is good. But is it? Is hard-selling by charities excusable or will it lead to a backlash that will ultimately hamper worthy causes?

I once had a cheeky letter from a charity telling me they were increasing my direct debit by £5 a month in line with inflation. I didn't argue. My conscience wouldn't let me. But couldn't someone else argue on behalf of the donating masses?



The problem is that fundraising is entirely self-regulatory. The Charities Commission is the government body in charge of how charities perform their good works, while the Fundraising Standards Board (FRSB) receives complaints from the public about how money is being raised. It puts these to the Institute of Fundraising, a membership body containing 1,857 charities, representing 50 per cent of the funds raised by all charities. The FRSB has powers to audit and investigate. Their 'give with confidence' tick logo is meant to assure the public that a charity is following best practice. But the IOF set their own code of practice. The code states that charities may not pressure potential donors but 'may use reasonable persuasion'. Ring a bell? An industry setting its own loose rules?

People have not wanted to complain about charities for fear of being seen as meanspirited, but now they are coming forward. In the month following Olive Cooke's death, the FRSB was sent 384 complaints about the behaviour of charities — compared with 488 for the whole of 2014.

The Charities Commission chairman William Shawcross says: 'Our research suggests that around two thirds of people feel uncomfortable about some methods of fundraising. This is a crisis for the charity sector which is testing the strength and capacity of self-regulation.' A task force has been set up to look at abuse of data and cold calling. The IOF has rushed out proposals to strengthen its code of conduct. The FRSB has told charities they must respect 'no cold calling' signs. And the minister for civil society, Rob Wilson, has told charities that they have until September to clean up their act or face new laws.

Maybe charities should have a statutory duty to check whether a potential donor can afford to donate. The FRSB does not believe, however, that charities should face as strict a statutory regime as financial services, arguing that this could hamper their ability to raise funds and that, away from head office, it is those needing our donations who will suffer.

But if ministers are forced to bring in regulation, it won't be anyone's fault but the charities'. They have two months to show they can be trusted. If they don't, they will have had their chance to behave ethically and, just like the banks, they will have blown it.

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## The Trump slump

Once the Republicans end their embarrassing summer romance, they're surprisingly well placed to beat Hillary Clinton

#### TIM STANLEY

unatics with money are never 'mad', only eccentric. In America, they are also Republican presidential candidates. So Donald Trump, a barmy billionaire with a mouth bigger than his bank balance is leading the race to be the party's next nominee. It's a sad indictment of the American political process. And it is a distraction from how strong American conservatism could be.

More than a dozen major Republicans are standing. Jeb Bush is notable for his establishment support, Scott Walker for his credentials as a governor who took on the unions, Marco Rubio for his charisma and ethnicity. In such a wide field, however, polling points are spread thin. Trump's on top with only around 18 per cent support — outpacing more serious candidates largely because people have heard of him.

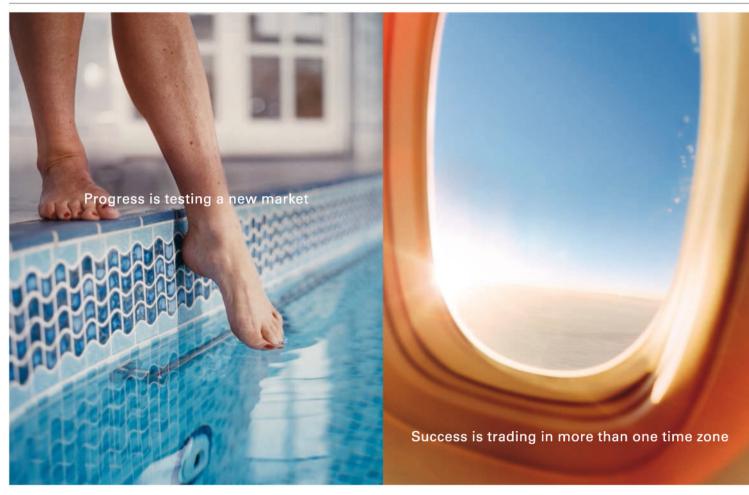
Trump is famous as a businessman and a TV personality, and for having hair that looks like something which laid down and died on his head. His politics are capricious. He has in the past been an independent, a Democrat, one of Hillary Clinton's donors, a Tea Party maverick and a birther who demanded to see President Obama's birth certificate; now he's an everyman who hates Chinese businessmen and illegal Mexican migrants. He launched his candidacy by saying that Mexico was sending its rapists across the border, and is now involved in a row about whether a man sexually assaulting his wife ought to qualify as rape. Senator John McCain, the former presidential candidate, said that Trump had 'fired up the crazies'. Trump replied that McCain was only considered a war hero because of his time in a Vietnamese prison camp, adding: 'I like people who weren't captured.' Trump has never served in the armed forces.

Donald will probably fade away by the end of summer. Freak candidacies always flare up in the months before the first contests of Iowa and New Hampshire. Fans of American politics may recall that about this time in 2011 everyone was worrying that Congresswoman Michele Bachmann might be a goer. She was the unblinking lady who once said *The Lion King* was gay propaganda. But she fizzled away as they all do, because Republican

#### Republican races usually end up as an establishment moderate against a conservative. And the moderate wins

voters are far more rational than early poll numbers suggest. Their primary races come down to two candidates: the well-financed establishment moderate and the outsider conservative. The moderate almost always wins easily. True, right-wing messiah Ronald Reagan won the nomination as the conservative, but it took three goes and he was far more centrist than is generally remembered.

This year's sane candidates are already piling in on Trump, condemning his remarks about Mexicans and McCain and demanding that he quit the race. In that same spirit, a few weeks ago the party responded to calls to remove the Confederate battle flag from



South Carolina's statehouse grounds with a surprising answer: 'Take it down.' The party that since the 1960s had courted white Southern voters by playing the Dixie card had — depending on your point of view — either surrendered to multiculturalism or embraced racial reconciliation. It is significant that the Republican governor of South Carolina is an Indian-American woman and its junior senator is an African-American. Those two are the future of the conservative movement.

Republican party distancing itself from politicians who label Mexicans rapists, or gay people a threat to the American way, would be more in tune with a country trending left on social issues. It would be well positioned for next year's battle against Clinton, who despite her seemingly inevitable nomination as a Democratic candidate remains unloved by a large proportion of Americans and vulnerable over her record as Secretary of State.

Moreover, the Grand Old Party's more hawkish approach to world affairs might be popular again. After a period of non-interventionism in foreign affairs, US voters increasingly want to re-engage. The terms of the recent Iran deal may have spooked them. Many are concerned about Obama's disengagement from the Middle East, a bold recalibration of policy that conservatives fear has



left Christians, Jews and moderate Muslims at the mercy of radical Islamists.

At home, polling suggests conservatives are in a narrow popular majority when they warn that the debt is too great, that Obama has overspent, and that healthcare reform is becoming a long-term problem. All that disenchantment was expressed in last year's midterm elections, when the Republicans swept Congress. Obama's time in office has done little to transform the lives of the poorest, — as race riots have shown. Working-class blacks remain underemployed and over-imprisoned. Obamanomics has most of all benefited the businessmen on Wall Street. Donald bloody Trump.

The problem is that these are all problems. The answers aren't so obvious and the right doesn't even seem to be looking for them. American conservatives have become good at articulating the anger of a dwindling demographic — the 18 per cent who nod without thinking when Trump speaks. But that fury has hardened into a policy-lite dogma that

pushes the Republicans further away from the White House with each passing year.

Back in 2010, it looked like the British Tories had sold out to the left to get in government, while the Republicans were sticking to their ideals. Now it is the Republicans who are desperately looking for more flags to lower because their reactionary politics has locked them out of power. Cameron's Tories, by contrast, are setting out their most ambitious conservative reform agenda since the 1940s — enacting radical ideas that will help the poor into work and save taxpayers money. Compromising with modernity could help Republicans get conservative stuff done.

But we return to that old problem: what would they do? Daniel McCarthy, editor of the American Conservative, says that the size and loudness of the Republican field proves that no one part of the right has ideas compelling enough to break through — 'which leaves room for an outsize, outrageous personality, in this case Trump, to grab attention'. He may be correct. At this stage in the contest good ideas are few and far between. But maybe some sense of direction could be gained by at least purging the bad ideas. Even if it can't agree what it is for, the Republican party might find unity in stating what it is against. Crushing Trump under the right's foot might be the beginning of the search for a moral platform that appeals to everyone.



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#### **MARY WAKEFIELD**

## Machetes and the middle classes



nother stabbing in my new neighbourhood, not with an axe or with a samurai sword this time, but a machete. The samurai sword incident was back in the spring. The magnolia was in bloom and the citizens of London N1 were about their innocent business, reading for book club and baking (wheat-free). At 3 p.m., a terrible screaming was heard coming from Englefield Road and when police arrived they found a teenage boy lying bleeding, sword on one side, meat cleaver on the other.

The machete killing which followed was worse. Daylight, but this time the crime scene was a playground. Children were goofing about after school, including the soon-to-be victim's sister. Witnesses said two teenagers appeared on a scooter. The driver allegedly said to his passenger: 'That boy in blue, get him,' and so he did. He ran over to 18-year-old Stefan Appleton, raised a machete and stabbed him repeatedly in the chest.

When I cycled past the playground that evening, the now-familiar yellow crime-scene tape was bagging gently in the breeze; the familiar fat and anxious young officer standing by. So I said, (though I already knew), 'What happened?' He said: 'Oh, not to worry, madam. Just a gang killing.'

Not to worry, just a gang killing. As knife crime rises across the capital, this has become the mantra of London's middle class. Back in May, new to N1, I assumed that a grisly stabbing in the hood would be the subject of horrified and excited talk. Far from it. 'Stabbing? Oh... that, it's just gangs.' said most of my neighbours. 'Have you tried the new deli?' The more brutal the murder, the more studiedly casual the response. A hand sliced off on Upper Street? 'Not to worry.' Death by icepick in the next street? 'Kids, eh?'

As the summer wore on, measured out in axe attacks, I began to understand the phenomenon better. The two dominant communities of N1 are council tenants, living mostly on estates, and homeowners, in their early Victorian terraces. Like other London boroughs, the area has gentrified at speed, filled with refugees from Marylebone and Notting Hill, and these two groups are so utterly opposed in both income and habits that they have evolved a kind of selective blindness. Same shops, same streets, but it's as if

they exist in suspension, like oil and water, unmixed. There's no middle group to bridge the gap, no shared habits or institutions, save perhaps the Church.

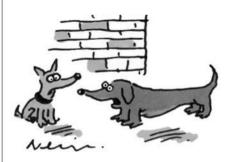
I can see how this strange apartheid began and even why it persists despite the murders. When you've spent a million or more on a family home and crooned over its cornices, it's easier to ignore the fact that children are being hacked to death outside. When you've told your neighbours, and they've told you, that this is the nicest part of London, a brilliant find, it seems better not to mention that it's also a hotspot for homicide.

Perhaps there are also political reasons for the wilful blindness. The N1 homeowner thinks of himself as caring. He's sensitive,

A hand sliced off on Upper Street? 'Not to worry.' Death by ice-pick in the next street? 'Kids. eh?'

Left-leaning and inevitably hostile to police stop-and-search on the grounds that it's racist. N1 man was right behind Nick Clegg when he kiboshed the plan to crack down on kids carrying knifes. He opposed 'two strikes and you're out', meaning that kids caught twice with knives go to jail. The N1 objection echoed Clegg: 'It'll demonise youngsters and destroy lives.' Cracking down on knife crime goes against the Islington grain. It cannot be a coincidence that, as the police eased off on stop-and-search, so knife crime in the capital took off and the knives became swords and meat cleavers and serrated scimitars.

What about the lives of the boys who've been stabbed? So far, they don't seem to feature. For all the youngsters injured or killed



'I can understand why Speaker Bercow doesn't like walking — he's only got little legs'

in London, by far the loudest outcry is still over Henry Hicks. Hicks was a thuggish white lad, often stopped by the police for driving his scooter dangerously. He crashed and died in a police chase late last year and oh, how Islington has been up in arms. There's graffiti all over north London: Justice for Henry Hicks, a memorial mural and now an official inquiry into his death, which shows how much influence an outcry can have.

So where's the outcry over all the boys hacked to death? I suppose it's just not as fun when you can't blame the police. The perps and the victims of most gang-related knife crime in my area are black — so there's no fashionable outrage to enjoy, just the murky sense of an unknown and disturbing world.

But the two N1 communities are linked, whether they like it or not. The extreme indifference of the middle classes isn't just amoral, it's a cause of crime, too.

Because the homeowners and the tax-payers haven't cared, because (until this month) the stats stayed silent, the police focus in N1 has been cyclists. There they've stood all year, the Met, at crossroads in the Angel area, fining bankers who jumped the lights while life on the estates went to pot.

To be fair, things changed in mid-July. The Commissioner announced what we'd known for months: that knife crime was on the rise and suddenly the 'two strikes' policy was back. When I turned down my street last week, there was a very different sort of police officer in evidence: lean, serious-looking and tough, no pot bellies or sideburns. They had stopped and were frisking a couple of teenage boys in a friendly but determined way, and my reaction to their presence was relief, both for myself and for the boys of the estates.

How will N1 react? Will they accept, after the meat cleavers and swords, that stop-and-search might be necessary? I've already heard some talk of discrimination and of 'two strikes' blighting young lives, but what I'd like them to consider is this: what would Mrs Appleton think? Stefan's mother, the mother of the kid killed in the playground back in June, don't you think she might have welcomed a tougher approach to carrying machetes in the street?

Toby Young on crime in Acton, p. 52.

#### **JAMES DELINGPOLE**

## A twinge of fear, and a glimpse of a harsher world



Lanka, watching from the warm, shallow sea as gaggles of local Muslims in holiday mood sauntered past to congregate at the public end of the beach about half a mile away. Since they looked so much more colourful, picturesque and exotic than the tourists in the security-guarded enclave where I was, I thought I'd wander down to take a few snaps.

Having just finished Ramadan, they were all very excited — the young men especially. Suddenly, as if from nowhere, a group of dark-skinned boys with wispy beards, barechested but in long trousers, had surrounded me. 'Selfie!' one of them said — the new universal word. So we put our arms round one another's shoulders and smiled for the phone cameras. Sweet kids, but for just a second they had given me quite a turn.

As I headed deeper into their territory, this discomfiture grew. Most of the women wore traditional local dresses — bright fabric with lots of red and orange and pink; no headscarves — but here and there you could see the beginnings of a trend towards more austere, Middle Eastern-style dress. Girls in veils sat gazing modestly into the sand. An intense youth dressed all in white like a cleric strode past with a superior air as if he had higher things on his mind than beach frivolity.

Once I'd retreated back to the safety of my hotel, I was disappointed to notice how relieved I felt. This is very unlike me. In the past, I've always been one of those travellers on a perpetual quest for the 'real' wherever: forever shunning my sanitised, poncy tourist zones in search of 'the place where the locals go to eat' and other bracingly authentic experiences.

On occasion this has got me into quite a bit of trouble. The time, for example, in Essaouira when I persuaded the Fawn that it would be culturally enriching for us to drink tea made from dried poppy-heads in the grotty flat of a souk spice trader — with the result that we spent the whole of the next day in a low-grade opium stupor, vomiting. Or the one where we travelled up to Dahab to smoke Bedouin weed with the man who had turned Jamie Blandford on to heroin at

Harrow: the journey home across the Sinai was only about an hour, but in my head it felt more epic, dramatic and gruelling than Xenophon's Anabasis.

What my most memorable travel experiences have in common, looking back, is that more often than not they happened in the Muslim world. Partly this has to do with geography: the Middle East and the Mediterranean being the cradles of civilisation, it's inevitable that Islamic nations should own so many of the world's must-see treasures, from Ephesus and Abu Simbel to Petra and Leptis Magna.

Partly too, though, it's down to cultural inclination. From Sir Richard Burton to

More often than not, my most memorable travel experiences happened in Muslim countries

Lawrence of Arabia, the Prince of Wales, the Fry's Turkish delight advert and — traditionally — almost the entire Foreign Office, we Brits have long had a bit of a pash for the world of hookahs, flowing robes, dunes, falconry, scimitars, camels, sheep's eyeballs and so on.

I'm certainly no exception. I've loved my travels in the Muslim world — the hospitality, the food (well, some of it), that slightly guilty thrill you get from being in a realm where possessing a penis is not a cause for shame — and even in the edgiest of situations I don't think I've ever felt truly threatened. Call me naive, but I've always been



'Ne'er cast a clout till July be out....

buoyed by my faith that Muslims, on balance, will do the right thing by strangers in their lands. This trust has so far always been repaid: the man who accosted me by the Pyramids and lured me through the maze of back streets really did just want to make me tea and show me his home; the Jordanian police really were true to their word when they vowed to catch by sundown the silly donkey guide who'd tried to sexually assault my then girlfriend.

That was what I found so depressing by my response to those women in headscarves and the young men dressed like clerics on the Sri Lankan beach. This is the first time in my travels, I think, when I've seen Muslims as a cause for mild trepidation. I wish it weren't so, first because it's so unfair and disproportionate (only a small minority of Muslims anywhere in the world and probably none in Sri Lanka would ever consider doing something like the Tunisian beach atrocity), and secondly because of what it means for the coming generations, both theirs and ours.

On our kids' side of the equation, it means no more: Lamu, Kenya, where my brother got stung by a scorpion; Sudan, where those army colonels barbecued a sheep they'd slaughtered in front of us before sharing some of the weed they'd confiscated on drugs patrol; Egypt, where I scaled the Great Pyramid before dawn so as to be on top for sunrise when I could also read the graffiti carved into the stone by Napoleon's troops; maybe not even Morocco, where apparently Isis are busily trying to recruit 'lone wolves' for the next Tunisia-style hit-job.

And on these countries' side, of course, it means fewer tourist pounds and dollars, less bridge-building contact with the people they're increasingly being taught to see as despicable kufar, and more of the poverty which acts as a seed bed for increased radicalism.

It's so sad for all of us and I see no end in sight. No more hippie trail. No more exotic Gap Yahs. In this supposed age of globalisation, the world you can safely explore — or, in cases like the Bamiyan Buddhas or doomed Palmyra, that you can ever see again — has shrunk not grown. Shame.

#### **LETTERS**

#### What we're building

Sir: I was surprised and frustrated to read Ross Clark's piece on housing associations in last week's edition of your magazine ('Stop moaning, start building', 25 July). Surprised because it seemed to misrepresent the facts concerning housing associations, and frustrated because the analysis offered by Mr Clark ignores the key role that housing associations play in ending the housing crisis. Housing associations - which vary hugely in geography, size and function — have consistently supplied tens of thousands of new homes year after year. For example, last year they built 40,000 homes — a third of all new homes — and they matched every £1 of public investment with £6 of their own money. Indeed, when private development dropped 37 per cent in the crash between 2007 and 2009, housing associations continued to build and even upped their output by 22 per cent to make up the shortfall.

Housing associations are not, as per Mr Clark's suggestion, the 'true villains' of the property crisis. Instead they are strong, open, positive, constructive and expert potential partners for government, willing to work together to end the housing crisis and provide the homes our country needs. *David Orr* 

National Housing Federation, London WC1

#### Blame the brainwashers

Sir: Jane Kelly ('Teenage terrors', 25 July), citing memories of the Baader-Meinhof gang, eloquently illustrates how easily young people are drawn to extremism. Those of us who have tried over the years to support families who have lost children to cults would go further. After dealing with hundreds of tragic cases, we have concluded that anyone, approached in the right way at the right moment, can be recruited and brainwashed into turning against family and friends, espousing grotesque beliefs and putting themselves at the disposal of destructive individuals or organisations. We have always predicted that similar techniques could be used to turn people into violent criminals, and Isis has amply demonstrated this to be true.

Convincing officialdom has been an uphill struggle: it is 30 years since our Home Office found it convenient to decide that cults are 'new religious movements' and that brainwashing does not exist. This has handicapped government policy ever since. Now that we have a national emergency on our hands, we need to finally take action. This must include following the example of France and Belgium, and legislating to

enable the identification and prosecution of the real criminals, those who ruthlessly exploit young minds for evil ends. Tom Sackville London SW1

#### A towering Low Life

Sir: Jeremy Clarke recently permitted some of us the delusion that we too could be Low Life correspondents. He even praised our efforts with a generous self-deprecation. Then, in his latest column (25 July), he reasserts his authority with a tale of extreme violence. The old lion stretched, yawned and dismissed us with a mere flick of his paw. How impressive. How cruel! Stephen O'Connor Enniskillen

#### Brown's history

Sir: In his excellent article 'Degrees in disaster' (25 July) James Bartholomew is mistaken in implying that Gordon Brown read economics with history at Edinburgh. He only read history. Brown's absence of any knowledge of economics was obvious to those working in the City long before



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he became chancellor. I am convinced that it was his knowledge of history that persuaded him to remove important powers from the governor of the Bank of England, for that great office had acted as a brake on a succession of profligate Labour chancellors. In the light of this, the consequences of his 13 years in office were entirely predictable: an economic disaster. *Jeremy M.J. Havard London SW3* 

#### Not forgetting Mbeki

Sir: James Bartholomew left out a very significant contributor to human misery in Africa: Thabo Mbeki, the former South African president, who was educated at Sussex University. His roaming of the internet persuaded him that HIV was not the cause of Aids, so his government denied antiretroviral drugs to pregnant women with Aids. The result is that South Africa is one of the few countries in Africa (if not the only one) in which the population is falling. Nigel Bruce
King's Lynn, Norfolk

#### Flight plan

Sir: As a former serving officer with the Royal Air Force, I have a simple solution to solve the budget crisis in the military: scrap the RAF. All the current work can be done by the other two services. Helicopters are used mainly to support the army, and army pilots have shown that you do not need to be a commissioned officer to pilot a helicopter. The Navy has a good record of flying fast jets, and our requirement for drones can be open to tender between the Army and Navy. The RAF's day was in the second world war, where they did valiant service. We must move on and pay for the best. RAF personnel should not be excluded from applying to the Navy and Army for the jobs that arise from the demise of their service.

John Fisher Arnside, Cumbria

#### Bottled laughter

Sir: Elisa Segrave's letter (25 July) and article reminds me of my wife's faux-pas on arrival at our new home in Canada in 1963. In those days even Canada delivered milk to our doors. My wife left a note in an empty bottle: 'Please knock me up for the bill.' Our friendly milkman let everybody in the apartment block see this note. My wife's innocent colloquial English led to her rapid popularity with our neighbours. *Patrick Corden* 

Dorchester

#### ANY OTHER BUSINESS | MARTIN VANDER WEYER

## Do Nikkei and the FT really share the same journalistic values?



It's nearly 30 years since I worked in Japan, but I still have a few words of the language and a certain idea of how the place worked. The role of the business press, for example, was to trumpet export successes of Japanese corporations, and not to report shenanigans in which securities firms boosted prices of selected shares by pushing them to housewife investors, to generate campaign funds for favoured politicians.

So I'm curious how the Financial Times will fare under its new owner Nikkei, the very Japanese media group that has paid £844 million to acquire the world's most prestigious business title. Has the culture changed since my day? I asked an old friend last seen in a karaoke bar behind Shimbashi station: 'There's not much evidence of objective inquiry: the mainstream press are a pretty docile bunch, and Nikkei is very much part of the system. They were critical of Olympus [the scandal-hit electronics group] but only because the story was reported abroad and the company was marked for a fall; likewise Toshiba recently. They sometimes take an adversarial attitude to government... but I'd say the editorial board can always be relied upon to place national interest ahead of the public's right to know.'

Rather confirming that impression, a Japanese minister said the FT deal 'will make it possible to transmit information on Japan's economic situation to the rest of the world more accurately'. Meanwhile, Nikkei chairman Tsuneo Kita says, 'We share the same journalistic values.' To which the optimistic answer must be: up to a point, Lord Akegane (that's Japanese for copper).

#### Black horse down

Shareholders seeking compensation from Lloyds Bank and its directors for failing to disclose the dire condition of HBOS when asking them to vote for its takeover in 2008 should equip themselves with copies of *Black Horse Ride*, Ivan Fallon's book on the circumstances of that notorious deal, which was immediately followed by a bailout.

At the time, Lloyds was seen as a low-risk operator that might have sailed through the financial crisis if chairman Sir Victor Blank had not been cornered by prime minister Gordon Brown at a party and strong-armed into rescuing crippled HBOS, on the basis of minimal due diligence. Having interviewed many players involved, Fallon concludes that is largely a myth. He says the dullness of Lloyds' strategy over the previous decade had driven it into a cul-de-sac; in search of growth, Blank and his chief executive Eric Daniels had long eyed HBOS for takeover and knew plenty about its business, but feared the competition authorities would stand in their way; Brown merely offered to push those hurdles aside in order to see HBOS swiftly into safer hands.

The 'myth' made the previously well-respected Blank look weak for allowing Brown to bully him into such a terrible deal. But the Fallon version makes the Lloyds men look more like Fred Goodwin of RBS in his determination to buy ABN-Amro despite rumblings of trouble ahead. One reviewer says 'Some will see [Black Horse Ride] as an apologia for Blank and Daniels': I think it makes them look worse.

#### Warning unheeded

I picked up positive vibes about the online white-goods retailer AO World long before the stock market started to get excited about it. Here was a progressive, fast-expanding business, based in formerly depressed Bolton, that was liked by customers for its keen prices and user-friendliness and by staff for its emphasis on workplace wellbeing. When it came to market at 285p a share in February 2014, I called the valuation of £1.2 billion 'slightly ridiculous' but congratulated founder John Roberts on his windfall of £86 million cash plus shares worth £400 million: 'Who can say he doesn't deserve it?'

The stock shot up to 378p, slid to 150p, climbed back to 330p — then crashed after a profits warning early this year. It now stands at 125p, and flak is flying from investors led

by hedge-fund grandee Crispin Odey, who holds 7 per cent of AO but says the flotation was 'overhyped and overpriced'. The consensus seems to be that AO is still a smart business with decent prospects — some brokers rate it a 'buy' at the current price — but that in a competitive, low-margin sector, it's unlikely ever to meet the ambitious targets that might, at a stretch, have justified the first frenzy for the shares. And no one has forgotten that Rothschild and other bankers who arranged the float collected more than £25 million between them.

The uplifting AO story I first discovered has turned, for the time being, into a cautionary tale of dotcom delusion. That's exactly why I warned John Roberts last March to 'be careful not to let his standing as an authentic entrepreneur be tainted by the market's eagerness to make a fast buck'.

#### Bad thriller

Three months ago I expressed the hope that international technocrats were working on 'Plan B... to bring back the drachma without chaos if continued [Greek] membership of the euro is impossible'. It turns out Plan B was indeed afoot, but that the operatives concerned were not men with clipboards from Washington and Basel: they were a secret team within the Greek finance ministry set up by this column's favourite former minister, Yanis Varoufakis.

His wheeze was to hack into tax computers in order to outflank the IMF and European Central Bank (which control Greece's public revenue flows) and create a 'parallel payments system' that would come into action if Greek banks collapsed — and switch to drachma if 'Grexit' was the only option left. This caper that never happened may sound 'reminiscent of a bad thriller', as Greece's centre-left Potami party says, but it adds weight to my campaign to give Varoufakis a special *Spectator* Parliamentarian award for sheer entertainment value. It won't surprise me if he pops up next on Jeremy Corbyn's campaign bus.



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#### **BOOKS**

## Caves of ice

Modern civilisation depends on refrigeration — but we have been trying to manufacture cold for at least 4,000 years, says *Michael Bywater* 

### Chilled: How Refrigeration Changed the World, and Might Do So Again

by Tom Jackson Bloomsbury, £16.99, pp. 223, ISBN 9781472911438 Spectator Bookshop, £13.99

Summertime, and the living is... variable. Depends who you ask. People come to mind, of course: one in hospital, waiting for an MRI scan; another just come out of hospital having had two little frosted ova thawed out and implanted, so with a bit of luck she'll have a baby at last.

One old chap, 90-ish, with several basalcell carcinomas on his pate from his young days as an army officer in the Palestine sun, is going for a painless zap with a cryoprobe: lesions gone and a free pathology section into the bargain. And over at Cern the Large Hadron Collider has sent a new pentaquark lately to the firmament.

The mind, generally, lags. It needs a book to provoke it into fresh life, into noticing old things anew. Tom Jackson's Chilled will do very well indeed, especially on a hot day of lassitude and indolence. A day like this one, almost dead of its own heat. 'Fair summer droops', as Thomas Nashe says. A day which once called for a heat-flushed girl, hair damp against her nape, now requires an iced mojito, droplets licking slowly down the glass, while the sea bass bakes. Then chilled Prosecco for sprezzatura, Orfeo on Spotify, and a bottle of artisanal Sacred Gin on ice should the vicar drop in. The salad's in the crisper... but, damn, the shopping list proclaims from its fridge magnet: salad dressing. So it's out in this delirious heat, but at least the car has aircon.

And all of this depends on one thing: cold. More precisely, it depends on chill-

ing: things being colder than they would be naturally.

The infant(s)-to-be depend for their frozen suspended animation upon liquid nitrogen, at -192°C. The MRI scanners depend, like the LHC, on magnets supercooled in liquid helium at -269°C. That's awfully close to absolute zero, at which everything stops: -273.15°C. It's rock bottom for thermodynamics and, practically, it can't be reached. But we can get close to it, the apotheosis of cold.

Cold (but not that cold) ices the mojito. Cold kept the fish fresh between sea and oven. Cold chilled the prosecco, and not

On the west bank of the Euphrates in 18th century BC, the new King Zimrilim sets about building an ice-house

only chilled the Sacred Gin but gave birth to it: it's distilled, not with heat, but with cold. Cold crisps the lettuce, cold is what the aircon manufactures, and if it weren't for manufactured cold, there wouldn't be a fridge door, and where would you put the fridge magnets then?

And the streaming music? The cool cleanliness of the internet is a delusion. We fool ourselves that, being intangible,

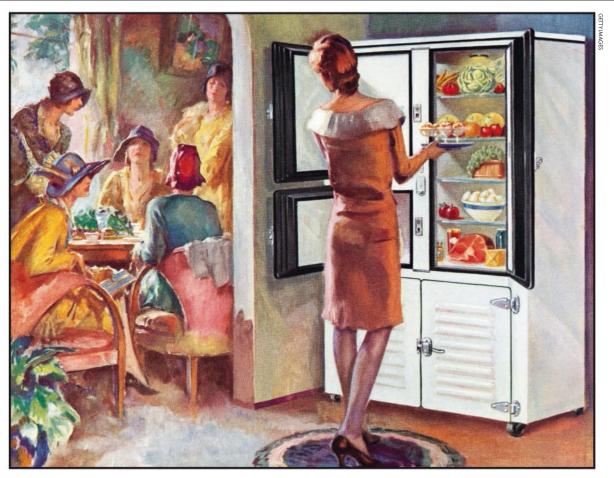
#### THE SPECTATOR BOOKSHOP

it's somehow unreal: that the information economy is infinitely better for the planet than filthy old industrial smokestacks. But a friend, scouting for new high-tech offices, immediately hired a helicopter to fly over the city, looking for roof-space for the huge aircon fans they would need. Those servers get hot and must be cooled. And the miracle is: they can be.

It was not always so. Heat was the bogeyman: enemy and friend. It kept us warm but it rotted stuff. The cold dead got hot again as they deliquesced: all those bacteria and larvae, digesting for dear dead life. Heat destroyed buildings but saved lives. But most of all, heat was relatively easy. It was already there, in everything: molecular bonds holding firm with the energy got, without exception, from nuclear fusion of helium, in the sun. Add oxygen, fracture the bonds, and we could warm ourselves, or cook our food. Metal smelts, pottery fires, Krook in Bleak House bursts into flames; it's as if we were detaching and carrying about tiny moieties of the sun. We were born of fire, even if we will ultimately perish of ice.

For most of our history, we've been able to do things about cold. For much of our prehistory, it wasn't an issue. In our species' African homelands, most of the time we were fine as we were, in our skin. Occasionally we might need something else's skin as well. Usually a fire would do the trick. If it got far too hot, though, we were stuffed; our best bet was to find a cave.

Cooler was a harder task, and this is the story which *Chilled* tells so enthrallingly: of how we learned to make our own cold. Tom Jackson opens his book of chilly mirabilia with a hymn to the refrigerator, a sort of simple but revolutionary heat-pump



The refrigerator takes centre stage at a 1920s luncheon party

we no longer even notice. It's just there, pumping out heat. (Not pumping in cold. That can't really be done. Laws of thermodynamics are the most important scientific laws that most people haven't heard about. And don't get me started on entropy or we'll be here forever and descend into chaos.)

It's a fascinating journey and Jackson conducts it in the manner of a wizard. From heat-pumps we whisk in a flash to 18thcentury BC Terga, on the west bank of the Euphrates, where the new king Zimri-lim sets about building an ice-house. We race, shivering and sweltering by turns, around the ancient world, to fifth-century BC Persia, to Egypt, from stone jars in water-pits to ceramic pots standing in kraters of snow (and, incidentally, giving sense to the naming of sorbet). Cold — colder than it should be — is always, in this narrative, as magical as Kubla Khan's 'sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice'. And domes over ice caves are a persistent metaphor, and reality, in Chilled.

The hunt for cold is, then, at least 4,000

years old. The Romans, always obsessed with water, were fascinated too by ice; the *decocta Neronis* drunk by the rather camp young emperor was nothing more nor less than melted ice, probably a sort of Slush Puppie. The Greek Pytheas claimed to have found Britain on his way to Ultima Thule (probably Trondheim) from where he brought ice to Naples, but 'Indian wizards had done it at least 1,000 years before'. Read on.

Our modern world is built on cold. Our northern European culture, though technically temperate, is naturally founded on it,

The Romans were fascinated by ice. The camp young Emperor Nero drank what was probably a sort of Slush Puppie

and in opposition to it, too. In summer, heat meant privacy; in winter, communality. Love blossomed in spring because lovers could be alone and warm. By the height of summer, drooping with the distant autumn, George Peele's young man was yearning: 'Then O, then O, then O my true love said/ Till that

time come again/ She could not live a maid', but the delicious sigh of erotic promise came with a best-before date: come foggy autumn, come cold winter, she would have to live a maid, because to be warm meant to be in company around the single open fire. It's really an invitation to private consummation now, now, in a hayrick or a hedgerow.

Off we may spin, from the hayrick to the dance (the language of the fan: the tap, the flutter, the gaze, unnecessary in an air-conditioned ballroom) to the bedroom (ice, the voluptuary's delight) to the cold, cold plunge-pool in temperate-zone health clubs.

Chilled is a fascinating technological, historical and social narrative which reminds us what we should be noticing and how it got there, and encourages us in our own flights of fanciful interconnection. Never mind your belly; this will stop your mind sagging on the beach. Not sure? Listen: Sir Francis Bacon was the first man (of many) to be killed by a frozen chicken, in 1621. There. Buy it. It's a chill-cabinet of curiosities: hot stuff, and deeply cool.

## The soul takes flight Mark Cocker

### Rainbow Dust: Three Centuries of Delight in British Butterflies

by Peter Marren Square Peg, £14.99, pp. 320, ISBN 9780224098656 Spectator Bookshop, £12.99

#### In Pursuit of Butterflies: A Fifty Year Affair

by Matthew Oates Bloomsbury, £18.99, pp. 480, ISBN 9781472924506 Spectator Bookshop, £15.99

Last month, at Edinburgh School of Art, I was interested to come across a student who'd chosen Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* as her end-of-year degree project. In the wonderful stage costume she'd designed for its central figure were three gloriously embroidered butterflies fluttering around his hat. Bats, yes, moths, maybe, but what exactly was the significance of butterflies to a man bound for subterranean hell? The answer is in *Rainbow Dust*, Peter Marren's superbly distilled statement on our national obsession with butterflies.

It turns out that western civilisation has projected a stream of ideas and meanings on to these creatures that have made them fertile artistic territory for centuries. As metaphors for transient beauty and brief pleasure, they are peculiarly fitting motifs for Marlowe's tragic character. Yet they can be found making similar moral commentary on human experience in works as varied as Hieronymus Bosch's 'Garden of Earthly Delights' and the kaleidoscope collages of Damien Hirst.

But butterflies are also suggestive of higher human ideals. The ancient Greek name for the insects was the same as their word for soul — 'psyche'. This was not just a chance association: the adult insect is, after all, a creature that turns from lowly larval 'worm' into one of the most beautiful of all life forms. Marren is insightful on all this psychology, but he is equally adept at exploring our scientific investigations of butterflies.

The creatures have been acquired and fetishised by naturalists for centuries. The author is not at all squeamish about the carnage inflicted by early collectors, having begun his own career as a child who killed the things he loved. In fact, he argues for indulgence of this youthful destructive phase because it often blossoms into strong moral feeling. He points out the irony that it is our own hands-off don't-touch conservation age that has witnessed the greatest losses of butterflies. One cannot help but ponder, however, what lay behind the obsessive appetites of Walter Rothschild, who assembled in the

early decades of the 20th century the world's largest private collection, comprising 2.25 million specimens.

What is most fascinating about Marren's history of butterfly science is the range of personalities that were devoted to collecting them. My favourite story involves the friendship between Margaret Cavendish-Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In 1766 they even went butterflying together in the Peak District, where the father of the French Revolution may have had more on his mind than just netting flies. He confessed to the duchess that he was one 'somewhat savage animal who would live with great pleasure in your menagerie'.



The Clouded Yellow, especially vulnerable to cold, wet weather, is rare in Britain and usually confined to the South Downs and south coast

GETTY IMAGES

At times that same excited frisson mingles with a whole range of earthier appetites in the impassioned memoir of self-confessed addict Matthew Oates. The author of *In Pursuit of Butterflies* is the National Trust's special adviser on all things lepidopteran. Here he has attempted to summarise a lifetime's fieldwork on Britain's 60-odd butterfly species. Oates has, in some ways, been both cursed and blessed in the enterprise by his possession of lengthy private diaries.

These casual jottings have allowed him to give an intimate portrait of the period. Unfortunately his blow-by-blow account is largely framed around three basic coordinates: the weather, a rather confusing map of butterfly-rich locations, and his myriad butterfly encounters. The downside of the format is a good deal of repetition and far too much detail. His editor should have been more assertive. Oates compounds the problem with a style that can

combine over-florid poetry with a schoolchild's sense of humour (the Duke of Burgundy fritillary is almost invariably 'His Grace', the female of the purple emperor 'Herself' or 'Her Majesty').

Yet no one can doubt the author's devotion to these insects and, while he modestly credits the central role played by Martin Warren as leader of the superb organisation Butterfly Conservation, Oates has been a tireless champion in his own right. He also manages, through sheer enthusiasm and extended reminiscence of so much butterfly magic, to conjure the residual enchantment in Britain's last places of wildlife plenty. Most impressive of all is his concluding chapter, aptly entitled 'Towards Some Meaning', where he diagnoses why conservation has so often failed to protect these quintessential inhabitants of ecological transience. He also seeks to answer his own nagging 50-year selfinquiry: why exactly should we care about mere insects?

His answer is simple but telling: 'The whole show is essentially about love.' Oates argues that nature conservation 'is about the relationship between people and nature and is an expression of love for, and an interaction with, the beauty and wonder of the natural world'. The whole essay is one of the best summaries of why nature matters and how we should all care. Its ten pages should be extracted and bound as a pamphlet for every single decision-maker in this country.

## Is no one having fun? Alex Clark

#### Left of the Bang

by Claire Lowdon 4th Estate, £14.99, pp. 338, ISBN 9780008102173 Spectator Bookshop, £12.99

Who'd be young? Not 25-year-old Tamsin, if her behaviour is anything to go by. A classical pianist who's never quite going to hit the heights, she devotes herself to playing for the residents of an old people's home. She's also acquired a boyfriend, Callum, a teacher several years her senior, for whom, when Christmas comes round, she buys an electric vegetable slicer that he's had his eye on. The couple holiday in a run-down B&B in Ilfracombe. They are not exactly living *la vida loca*.

But Tamsin is also suffering from a kind of arrested development — still occupying her childhood bedroom in Holland Park, where she keeps a watchful eye over her mother, Roz, since Tamsin's father, a celebrated conductor, quit the family home for another woman. (Roz, in fact, is doing rather well; having been through the dyeing-your-hair-black phase, she is coining it in giving lectures on the healing power

of revenge.) Far more significant is Tamsin's acceptance of Callum's near-total and apparently inexplicable impotence; the couple develop a limited sexual repertoire in response to it, but their general emotional state is one of tacit and occasionally uneasy acceptance.

Claire Lowdon's serious-minded but nevertheless sparky debut novel can be seen as an extended rebuttal of the secret but abiding anxiety — especially among the youth — that everybody is having more, or better, sex than they are. What if, she asks, nobody is? Not even Chris Kimura, the charismatic soldier Tamsin spent a (chaste) evening with years previously, who suddenly arrives back into her and Callum's life. He might be able to pull after a blind date in Bella Pasta — Lowdon is unobtrusively good on the non-glamour of London life — but once he's hooked up with Callum's obsessionally self-controlled flatmate, Leah, his sex life plummets too.

Left of the Bang is not a didactic novel, but its story certainly mutates from social comedy into something far more disturbing. None of its characters escapes disaster, especially Callum, whose strengthening feelings towards the Home Counties children he teaches Latin and Greek provide the book's second half with a gripping, horrible tension. The power of the storyline is increased because one of his pupils, the awkward Sophie Witrand, becomes a character in her own right. 'If he was powerless in his private life,' reflects Callum, 'then here, in the classroom, he had supreme control.' Alas, as the novel demonstrates, control is an illusion that damages us as much as we cherish it.

## LA runs riot Tim Martin

#### All Involved

by Ryan Gattis Picador, £12.99, pp. 384, ISBN 9781447283164 Spectator Bookshop, £11.69

Ryan Gattis's novel All Involved is set in South Central Los Angeles in 1992, during the riots that began after four white police officers were acquitted of beating the black taxi-driver Rodney King. The inadvertent coup that the book's publishers have scored by bringing it out in the wake of the Baltimore and Ferguson riots only underlines how far we haven't come since then: some lines from this buzzing thriller might still be quotes from yesterday's news stories, such as the impassioned complaint of one character against the police: 'If you're brown or black, you're worth nothing. Killing you is like taking out the trash. That's how they think.'

Judging by damage caused, Gattis writes, the 1992 riots were 'the greatest civic disturbance in the history of the United States'. In six days, at least 60 people were killed, more than 2,000 were injured, upwards of a billion dollars' worth of property was damaged and some 40,000 people were deprived of their livelihoods because of arson or fire damage.

This is the backdrop against which *All Involved* unfolds, but the novel isn't quite the socio-political panoply that its title, which plays on a gang phrase for being connected with organised crime, seems to suggest. It consists of 17 first-person narratives — fictional, but apparently based on interviews by the author with gang members — describing a bloody vendetta between Hispanic gangs who seized on the chaos of the race riots as a chance to settle scores.

The story begins with the opportunistic murder of an innocent chef whose brother and sister are both 'involved', but rapidly becomes a Jacobean spiral of revenge and counter-revenge by people who, in sections of the city effectively deserted by the police, are living out what one character calls a 'Devil's Night in broad daylight'.

On the edge of the narrative, other voices swirl. There's a Korean shopkeeper, a fireman, a nurse and a soldier from 'a US govern-

ment agency that I cannot currently name' with his own grimly pragmatic approach to gang violence. Each of these characters proves to have a tangential connection to the plot as it assembles itself from the sequence of apparently discrete accounts, and Gattis manages this in an extremely satisfying way, with characters named in previous segments narrating later ones, or mysteries left open in early chapters offering solutions to the attentive reader further on. This technique will be familiar to viewers of the TV series *The Wire*, which, of course, borrowed them from novels in the first place. How the snake swallows its own tail.

The author's ear for the rhythms of American speech is another standout. All Involved swings with dialect and slang to the point that it feels compelled to provide a glossary at the end (though I'm not sure we needed 'chorizo: spicy pork sausage' or 'hood: abbreviation of neighbourhood'); and there's deep thought going on behind this writerly novel about the language of people whose prime modes of expression are not written. The back-and-forth of vernacular speech lends humour and humanity to the book, giving its crowded and often desperate scenes the flavour of authentic experience. 'Work in LA, live way the fuck away,' rhymes one character as he heads to a fatal assignation in the hills above town. Another, as he contemplates quitting the life of crime, delivers my favourite line of the book: 'I was just like them French people, when I had to say "La Vi," and be out.'

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## The crackdown that backfired

Tom Miller

#### China's Forgotten People: Xinjiang, Terror and the Chinese State

by Nick Holdstock I.B. Tauris, £14.99, pp. 288, ISBN 9781784531409 Spectator Bookshop, £13.49

In October 2013, a jeep ploughed through a crowd of pedestrians on the edge of Tiananmen Square, crashed and burst into flames, killing five people. The authorities identified the driver as Uighur, a member of an Islamic ethnic minority hailing from China's northwest region of Xinjiang. Six months later, eight knife-wielding Uighurs rampaged through a packed railway station in Kunming in southwest China, killing 29 people and wounding more than 140 others — an attack described by the national media as 'China's 9/11'.

Beijing blamed both attacks on radical Islamist organisations pursuing what it calls the 'three evils': terrorism, separatism and religious extremism. It claims terrorists are attempting to create an independent Islamic state in Xinjiang, directed by hostile foreign forces aligned with al-Qaeda and the Taleban. Since the World Trade Center attacks in New York in 2001, Beijing has explicitly linked its crackdown in Xinjiang to the US's global war on terror, portraying China as a fellow 'victim of international terrorism'. And it has used this to justify restrictions on Uighur culture and religion in the name of 'security'.

In China's Forgotten People, the Edinburgh-based writer Nick Holdstock sets out to 'reveal truth from facts' in Xinjiang, to appropriate one of the Communist Party's pet phrases. Holdstock's central contention is that there is little proof of either organised Islamic terrorism or widespread separatist agitation in Xinjiang, where he used to live. Instead, the spiralling violence witnessed over the past few years is itself a reaction to repressive government policies put in place to control 'terrorism' — a self-fulfilling prophecy that is, tragically, now inciting the real thing.

Holdstock starts with a concise history of Xinjiang, explaining how this vast expanse of desert, steppe and mountain in central Asia is actually a relatively new addition to the Chinese empire. Conquered by the Qing emperor Qianlong in the mid-18th century, it was not named 'Xinjiang' - 'new territory' in Chinese — until 1884. Foreigners referred exotically to 'East Turkestan', a name that would be revived by Uighur nationalists in the 1930s. No one viewed Xinjiang as an essential part of China until the 19th century, and it wasn't until 1959 that Communist officials formulated the rigid line that Xinjiang 'has since ancient times been an inseparable part of the motherland'.

Since then China's leaders have encouraged Han Chinese to migrate to Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, as it is now formally but misleadingly known. They have funnelled vast sums into updating the transport network, industrialising agriculture and developing the oil and gas industries. But most of this wealth has flowed back to Beijing or into the pockets of Han Chinese immigrants, fuelling resentment among native Uighurs. Conflict has surged since vicious ethnic riots in 2009 killed 197 people and injured nearly 2,000. Last year's reported body count — though no one knows the true figure — was around 400. Beijing's response is to enforce 'unity and stability' with a heavy hand.

Holdstock explains the sad plight of Xinjiang's Uighurs, recounting how the authorities have turned much of the region into a police state, raiding homes and banning symbols of religious devotion. But he is admirably even-handed, criticising Uighur activists for distorting history for political ends. He writes scathingly of the World Uighur Congress, a US-based activist group, which perpetuates 'the same kind of misrepresentation as the government they oppose'. This meticulously researched book is anything but a crude exercise in China-bashing.

He also chastises foreign media for too readily linking unrest in Xinjiang to separatism or terrorism. Hundreds of protests happen across China every day, and most are not politically motivated. Why should Xinjiang be any different? Reporters have done a valiant job in raising awareness of Chinese state repression in Xinjiang, but they must beware unwittingly legitimising the government's 'terrorist' narrative. References to the role of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) — a shadowy organisation that Beijing dubiously accuses of masterminding terrorist attacks from abroad — only help the government's cause.

So what to make of the Kunming knife attack, 'China's 9/11'? Holdstock admits that a small group of Uighurs deliberately targeted civilians for political ends. As such, it qualified as terrorism. But there is still no evidence that the ETIM or any other 'terrorist' organisation was responsible, or that the attack was fuelled by religious sentiment. An alternative explanation, he suggests, is that this was a desperate act of Uighur resistance against state repression. Since Beijing's policy of control is supposed to ensure security, its attempt to fight 'terrorism' appears to be creating the very problem it is supposed to combat. And that should worry China's leaders far more than an exaggerated threat from Islamist terrorists outside



Illusions of grandeur: Roy Strong as a Stuart king (Charles I, after Sir Anthony Van Dyck) and (above right) a Renaissance prince (Federigo da Montefeltro, after Piero della Francesca) Roy Strong at 80: Photographs by John Swannell, an exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery, will run until 31 August, admission free

#### Fancy dress parade Christopher Fletcher

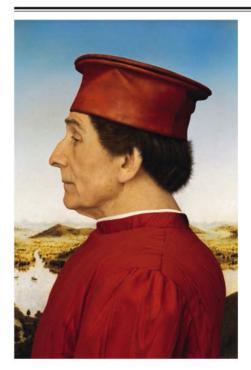
#### Sir Portrait: Thirty Portraits of Sir Roy Strong

by Roy Strong and John Swannell Frances Lincoln, £20, pp. 96, ISBN 9780711237414 Spectator Bookshop, £16

For his 75th birthday, Sir Roy Strong gave himself a personal trainer. For his 80th, he has commissioned a book of portraits of himself by the photographer John Swannell. The fruits of all that training — much of it undertaken on a racing tricycle around the lanes of Herefordshire — can be seen in

the six-pack he sports in one of the luscious, technically excellent images. Oh, hold on a mo, it's the costume of a Roman Emperor, Photoshopped to turn Roy into classical sculpture for his latest garden temple!

This magnificently potty book takes us through 30 versions of Roy done after celebrated portraits, or in the manner of various schools. He is swoon-worthy as a Victorian Sir Galahad, masterful as Isambard Kingdom Brunel and bloody terrifying as Rasputin. Swannell, alas, drew the line at David Beckham. From his early scholarship at the Warburg, to his directorships of the National Portrait Gallery and V&A, portraits have been Roy's thing. As, of course, has been sashaying through society in beautiful plumage while recording the whole parade,



both in photographs and in waspish and witty diaries which, as this book reveals, he has started keeping again.

The book is a tease. As with everything Sir Roy does, there is more than meets the mirthful eye. He is a neo-Romantic who has created a garden of wit and allusive sophistication. He commissions intelligent painters such as Richard Shirley Smith and Jonathan Myles-Lea and sports jewellery by Kevin Coates. All tap a peculiarly English vein. He is devoutly Anglican and often says pertinent and provocative things about church and state. Look at and read this book. You'll have a camp old time of it, but you'll learn more than you thought you might.

## Children's summer reading Melanie McDonagh

It's the 150th anniversary of *Alice in Wonderland* — cue an explosion of editions of the book, a new biography of Lewis Carroll, make-and-do books, jigsaw puzzles and general *Alice* overload. In a way, it's all dandy. *Alice* is part of our collective consciousness, even though for modern children it's chiefly through the medium of assorted films. The Lewis Carroll industry hasn't, however, even tried to rehabilitate his two later *Sylvie and Bruno* works, now unreadable thanks to the late-Victorian fashion for babytalk.

Trouble is, the cult of Wonderland has rather blinded us to the fact that *Alice* unexpurgated is actually quite hard for contemporary children. Of course any child will like a white rabbit with a pocketwatch, but the language and mental world of the book is so much of its time that it doesn't make for an easy read. *Through the Looking-Glass* is a

challenge for children who don't know the first thing about chess.

Take the little incident that precedes the Caucus race, when the creatures who have been swimming in Alice's pool of tears try to dry out. The mouse declaims:

Are you all ready? This is the driest thing I know. William the Conqueror, whose cause was favoured by the pope, was soon submitted to by the English, who wanted leaders and of late had been much accustomed to usurpation and conquest...

Getting the joke of that depends on knowing that dry as in 'not wet' is the same word as in 'dull and uninteresting'. I'm not sure most children would.

But all's not lost. There are a couple of versions of Alice which omit passages like this, and just cut to the chase, giving you all the characters and incidents a younger reader needs — done by the author. *The Nursery* Alice (Macmillan, £12.99, Spectator Bookshop, £11.69) is the full 1890 edition, complete with preface and Tenniel illustrations, and it explains tricky words, but the diction may grate ('Now don't be in a bad temper about it, my dear child! It's a very little lesson indeed!') with a modern reader. Better, I think, is - don't laugh - Alice's Adventures in Wonderland: Little Folks' Edition of 1907 (Macmillan, £9.99, Spectator Bookshop, £9.49) which is dinky in size but has the crucial illustrations and is a sixth of the length of the original. I think it's the best reading version for younger readers.

What to say about Noel Langley's *The Land of Green Ginger* (Faber, £6.99) except that it's a delight from start to finish? The publishers have reproduced the original longer edition of the 1966 text with inside illustrations by the incomparable Edward Ardizzone. It's one of those perfect combos of narrative and pictures which stays with you, well, always. For a flavour of the thing, here it is:

I bring you a tale of heroes and villains as in life; birds and beasts just as in zoos; mysteries and magic just as in daydreams; and the wonderful wanderings of an enchanted land which was never in the same place twice.

Plus green djinns and a button-nosed tortoise.

For very young children, it's the combination of verse and pictures which make for the best bedtime reading, and *Captain Jack and the Pirates* by Peter Bently and the wonderful illustrator Helen Oxenbury (Puffin, £12.99, Spectator Bookshop, £11.69) is a charmer, about a sand-ship that turns into a galleon, then back again in time for ice cream.

Another charming read-and-look is Lauren Child's *Hubert Horatio*: *The Millionaire Child Genius* (Puffin, £7.99, Spectator Bookshop, £7.59). Hubert is the brilliant offspring of 'frightfully, frightfully rich' parents. Alas, his best efforts couldn't stop them falling into penury and ending up in a tower block

called Plankton Heights. And you know what? They didn't mind a bit, because there was always someone available to play Kerplunk. Nope, I don't believe it either.

In Their Shoes (Pushkin Children's Books, £6.99) is a curiosity, a collection of stories from around the world featuring, yep, shoes. I had thought that the gruesomeness of Hans Christian Andersen's 'The Red Shoes', the familiarity of things like Hop O' My Thumb (seven league boots) and the sheer briskness of the original ninth century (Chinese) 'Cinderella' might be offputting; but nope, my eight-year-old really liked it

The cult of Wonderland has blinded us to the fact that Alice unexpurgated is actually quite hard for contemporary children

and was unfazed by the chopping-off of feet and heads. The pictures by Lucie Arnoux are mannered, with captivating detail.

Children who fancy a career as an astronaut — more interesting, frankly, than one as a footballer — will love *The Usborne Official Astronaut's Handbook* (Usborne, £6.99), in association with the UK Space Agency, which gives you the lowdown on qualifications, the horrors of G-force and how to go to the loo in the International Space Station (into a kind of vacuum cleaner, apparently). It's full of good practical stuff; but does briefly mention the dispiriting likelihood that future astronauts will probably find themselves working for Virgin, rather than Nasa.

Frank Cottrell Boyce needs no introduction. His latest book for children, The Astounding Broccoli Boy (Macmillan, £10.99, Spectator Bookshop, £9.89), is about a boy who turns bright green after being shoved into a river, and then finds himself a human guinea pig in a research lab. His vicissitudes, of which being green is probably the least, make for an engaging story; the only downside really, is that the moral of the tale — 'the best thing about people is how different they are' - is heavily underscored. Interestingly, as he tells us, there really were a couple of green children once, if the chronicler Ralph of Coggeshall is to be believed.

For teenagers, the paperback edition of Leslie Wilson's *Last Train from Kummers-dorf* (Faber, £6.99) is a beautifully written story of two young Germans' flight west from the horrors of the war's end, specifically, the Russians. It's unsparing, based on the author's family history, but funnily enough, hopeful rather than bleak.

Puffin has reissued 20 of its best titles over the last 80 years in a series called simply A Puffin Book. It's wonderful stuff—titles include *The Wolves of Willoughby Chase, Ballet Shoes* and *Bogwoppit*—and for £6.99 each. Snap 'em up.

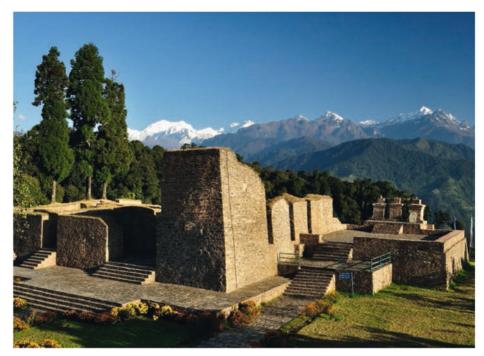
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Left: Rabdentse, near Pelling, the ruined former capital of Sikkim, with Mount Kanchenjunga in the distance. Above: Thondup and Hope on honeymoon in 1963

#### Lost horizon Sara Wheeler

#### Sikkim: Requiem for a Himalayan Kingdom

by Andrew Duff Birlinn, £25, pp. 388, ISBN 9781780272863 Spectator Bookshop, £21

Sikkim was a Himalayan kingdom a third of the size of Wales squeezed between China, India, Nepal and Bhutan. I was there once in April, when the sky was cornflower blue. When Britain withdrew from India the last 'Chogyal', or king, battled for his country's independence, but Mrs Ghandi won the war, and Sikkim is an Indian state now. It's a sad story, as Andrew Duff's subtitle suggests, but one representative of 20th-century geopolitics.

This dense book - Duff's first places Chogyal Thondup Namgyal at the centre of the story and focuses exclusively on the period from the 1950s to the 1970s. Sikkim's strategic position is crucial, particularly as the Cold War hots up, and spies from Peking, Delhi and Washington sidle on and off the pages. Everyone gets particularly worked up about Tibet (Sikkim, unlike most of the other princely states, was and is Buddhist, and had strong ties with the Lhasa theocracy). The Chogyal's sister Coocoola, an important figure, was passionate about the Tibetan cause and rode the trade route over to Gyantse with a rifle over her shoulder and a revolver in her pocket.

There is, too, a touch of Grace Kelly glamour, as in the lounge of the Windermere Hotel in Darjeeling Thondup met a 20-year-old American beauty called Hope Cooke. They married in 1963, 'in the shadow of the Sino-Indian conflict'. A scarletrobed lama officiated, and the Maharaja of Jaipur brought his own champagne. Cooke embraced her new country, but noted astutely: 'I can just see them using me as a wedge to help destroy his [Thondup's] rule.' And they did. The tide turned against her almost everywhere, as tides always do. *Newsweek* called her 'a Himalayan Marie-Antoinette', and Henry Kissinger (who pops up frequently) wrote, with characteristic sensitivity: 'She has become more Buddhist than the population.'

Duff has undertaken diligent research in diplomatic archives across the world and it is hard to imagine there is much information about this small place in those decades that has escaped his attention. Just as he finished

The tide turned soon after the royal wedding and the queen was dubbed 'a Himalayan Marie-Antoinette'

his first draft, Wikileaks released 500 secret cables revealing fresh information about US involvement in Sikkim. As Duff writes: 'The patchwork of alliances and enmities surrounding and within Sikkim had the characteristics of a fiendishly complex multiplayer game of chess.' China did not recognise Sikkim as part of India until 2005.

I would have liked more background information on the topography and customs of thin-aired Sikkim, and in particular on the various ethnic groups (they barely get a mention). Duff mentions 'Sikkim's separate identity', but one never gets a clear sense of what it is. Equally, while I admire the

author's refusal to indulge in speculation, he remarks often that the relationship between Cooke and Thondup was 'never simple', yet these pages offer the reader little insight on how.

As is often the case with nationalist causes, Sikkim wanted to be free of India but was heavily reliant on the aid flowing from Delhi. Inevitably, Mrs Gandhi got her way and annexed the kingdom in 1975. Duff is sympathetic to Thondup and instinctively on his side, but he makes it clear that the man was not an adept politician. Emotion ruled the day — when his minders in Calcutta refused to let him fly the Sikkim flag on his car, he let the vehicle proceed without him and walked with an assistant holding the flag.

In short, he was not up to his job. One wonders who would have been, with almost every superpower on the case. 'Everyone agrees,' writes Duff, 'that Sikkim's sensitive geopolitical position dealt Thondup an almost unplayable hand.' At least the state enjoys relative peace now, living off hydroelectricity and tourism — unlike Tibet. But one has ample evidence that Beijing will not rest until cultural annihilation on the plateau is complete.

As a result of a referendum, the monarchy was abolished in 1975, and the marriage crumbled under the strain of events. Cooke left the modest palace in Sikkim's capital, Gangtok, and returned to America with her two children. Thondup died in 1982, and Cooke lives on in New York, though she refused to meet Duff. He quotes judiciously from her autobiography *Time Change*.

This a wonderful story, expertly told, and, given the Everest of books on India, Duff was clever to spot it. What a film it would make!

#### Angry, funny, timely Suzi Feay

#### The Mark and the Void

by Paul Murray Hamish Hamilton, £12.99, pp. 462, ISBN 9780241145128 Spectator Bookshop, £10.99

It's not Paul Murray's settings or themes — decadent aristocrats, clerical sex abuse, the financial crisis — that mark him out as original, it's his handling: the wild plotting, the witty dialogue and the eccentricity of his characters. The follow-up to his widely admired second novel *Skippy Dies* swaps the adolescent funk of a Catholic boys' boarding school for the testosterone whiff of a fictional investment bank in Dublin. The Bank of Torabundo rode out the demise of the Celtic Tiger thanks to its cautious and effective CEO, but he has now been replaced by a flamboyant financial genius whose last bank collapsed in tatters.

Claude Martingale, a French analyst, advises clients on prudent investments, which frequently pits him against sociopathic star trader Howie: 'Crazy Frog, what the cock are you telling custies about Tarmalat?... I'm trying to *sell* them Tarmalat, you fucking dunce!' Claude is as surprised as anyone to be approached by a novelist looking for a

real-life protagonist for the bank-heist thriller he is writing. Together with his sidekick, a villainous looking 'poet', Paul shows more interest in the office's vents, ducts and wall cavities than the minutiae of trading.

Just as Claude is gearing himself up for his role as Bloom in a 21st-century, financially focused *Ulysses*, Paul discovers there is no safe on the premises. 'We fund our operations primarily with short term or even overnight borrowings,' chortles Claude. 'We are all just 24 hours away from a funding crisis! This is investment banking's "dirty little secret"!' When Paul inexplicably loses interest in his thriller, Claude has another idea: he wants Paul to fictionalise his actual life. 'Move the narrative forward, create scenes, maybe some dialogue.'

If Claude starts off as 'the mark', then Paul is 'the void', but the distinction between the pair quickly becomes blurred, as Claude participates in ever more implausible scams. The novel fizzes with cutting observations and gags about post-Celtic-Tiger Dublin life. The bankers' favourite bar, 'Life', with its mirrors, zebra-stripe throws and 'palpable air of incipient violence', resembles 'a cross between a hairdresser's and the Stanford Prison Experiment'. One young analyst is so used to porn he can't assess real women any more: 'I have to imagine if I saw her on a screen would I

click on her. 'Look at her through my phone,' a colleague offers.

The broad farce occasionally relies on cliché and equally broad characterisation. Because Claude is French, his gullibility can be put down to being a fish out of water, and the object of his affection is Greek, so she can speechify: 'We didn't drop cluster bombs on Baghdad! We didn't blow up hospitals in Gaza! Now, because we didn't pay back some loans, we are the worst in the world?' Similarly, Paul's lap-dancer wife Clizia is a familiar literary type: the haughty, scowling yet alluring eastern European woman.

'The Mark and the Void' also turns out to be the title of a darkly enigmatic and valuable artwork, in whose depths the characters think they can discern profound messages. The worlds of art, literature, commerce and banking are all rife with magical thinking, Murray suggests. Paul's destitution is partly due to having bought a shoddy 'luxury flat' off-plan at the height of the boom. Howie has found the financial equivalent of defying gravity: monetising failure: 'Profit is finally liberated from circumstance! It's the Holy Grail! It's the singularity!' Every aspect of western civilisation is now 'too big to fail'. But rescue plans only work if there's some mug left to buy. We are all currently situated between the mark and the void. This novel is sharp, satirical, tinged with dread and utterly of the moment.

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Fringe rubbish: Company Non Nova's 'L'Apres-Midi d'un Foehn', a highlight of 2013

sleet and they head to the Pleasance to selfmedicate with the hospitality budget. Fringe veterans tell me that even getting a publicist to attend their show is a major coup. The most your PR firm will do is to email your press release to their 'exclusive list of 100 high-value media contacts', which is how they describe the spam accounts of the Critics' Circle. What they don't tell you is that getting a critic to see a show by sending an email is like getting David Cameron to give you an earldom by sending smoke signals. Third, the 'asymmetric' marketing ploy you've worked on for weeks will crash and burn. My show bears the eve-catching title, A History of Feminism (as told by a sexist

to bother. Publicists are brilliant at selling themselves to performers but as soon as the

fee of £1,000 (plus VAT) reaches their bank

account their enthusiasm melts like August

Third, the 'asymmetric' marketing ploy you've worked on for weeks will crash and burn. My show bears the eye-catching title, A History of Feminism (as told by a sexist pig), and when I premiered it last May at the Brighton Fringe I assembled a catalogue of eminent women and wrote to them all, in deliberately vague terms, asking permission to use their image during the performance. My hope was that this intrusive and faintly creepy request would ignite suspicion

## The only woman who replied with good humour was Julie Burchill – but she broke her leg and couldn't come

and outrage. I expected the venue to teem with private detectives, litigation clerks and undercover council officers seeking evidence that I'd committed a breach of privacy by exhibiting an unauthorised picture. It never happened. Most of the grandes dames ignored me. One or two loftily ordered their executive assistants to 'forward a suitable publicity shot'. A famous novelist sent me a sniffy email: 'I can't think of a good or a kind reason why I should say yes.' And the only person who replied with good humour was Julie Burchill, who told me to grab any old picture from the internet and to expect her at the show. Unfortunately she broke her leg instead. What a waste of time. I sent 150 letters, received eight replies and scored zero spectators.

There are one or two mistakes I'll be able to skirt around. The name of my show, you'll notice, is rather verbose. That's deliberate. The theatre has an in-built commercial flaw in that the customer is obliged to pay for the product before having seen it. So the surest way to minimise this nuisance is use your title to advertise your show's content. But it amazes me to see so many Edinburgh participants who seem oblivious to the ruthless nature of the marketplace. Here are some shows that stand a chance of survival: Janis Joplin: Full Tilt, Zorro the Musical, 101 Reasons Why I Hate Katie Hopkins. Punters can see what they're getting. Now look at these chosen at random from the 420-page Fringe brochure: Carapace, Catalpa, IamI, #Realiti,

ARTS

## Look at my Fringe

Our theatre critic, Lloyd Evans, makes his Edinburgh debut

ike everyone performing at the Edinburgh Fringe I'm about to make a lot of mistakes. I'm about to lose a lot of money too. But after ten years covering the festival as a reviewer I'm at least able to predict which errors I can't avoid blundering into.

First, the campaign to attract a crowd will be pointless. This stands to reason. Five or six thousand hopefuls swarm up to Edinburgh each year and they all use the same marketing strategy. Attention-seeking stunts on the Royal Mile. Tiresome afternoons forcing leaflets on unimpressed Americans. Flyposting after dark, on tiptoe, by torchlight. Desperate texts to friends of friends promising five-for-one discounts. Bravura letters to newspaper editors offering 'an exclusive front-page splash about this groundbreaking work of art'. None of these endeavours qualify as true promotional work. They're just a neurotic alternative to curling up on your bunk-bed murmuring, 'Why did I come here?' into a flask of cooking sherry.

Second, the publicist will let you down. You can try chivvying him or her (more likely her) to make a greater effort to promote your show but she has scant reason

Raymondo, Sequamur, Tether, Teaset. What the hell are they about? I doubt anyone will know

I shan't waste time praying that every performance sells out. Low attendance is a certainty and it doesn't reflect on the quality of the show. I saw Reginald D Hunter play to a dozen punters and a guide-dog in 2007. It happens. You don't get the audience you deserve, you get the audience the gods decree.

I won't suffer nerves beforehand either. I don't see the point. Even the most seasoned performer endures waves of fear and nausea before stepping into the limelight and yet an obvious remedy is at hand. Double vodkas. Ingest four of these miraculous potations in the half-hour before curtain-up and you can convert your torture-chamber into a realm of instant and growing pleasure. If you're worried about alcoholism, think of your chemical cushions as dry martinis. Derelicts swig hooch. Sophisticates sip cocktails.

And no matter how much booze I sink

#### An obvious remedy for stage fright is at hand: double vodkas

I shan't dream of 'a London transfer'. The famous itinerary of *Beyond the Fringe*, which went from Edinburgh to Broadway via the West End, is a thing of the past. Yes, a few Fringe shows make the journey to the capital every year but invariably they go to smallish, cheapish venues which the producer has booked in advance knowing that the words 'direct from Edinburgh' create the impression that the show is a surprise hit carried south on a tidal wave of popular acclaim. Not so. The wily impresarios are just manipulating the poor old London punters.

Nor will I fantasise about a preview from the BBC. My show doesn't offer the Beeb what it wants, namely topicality, scandal, death, celebrity, voyeurism and victimhood. Especially victimhood. Experimental staging helps too. If I were a BBC arts editor I'd have my eye on a song-and-dance show, *Coffin Ship*, about real-life Sudanese migrants who wrote an award-winning musical version of their story and are about to recreate it in Leith dockyards, with a chorus line of local ex-junkies, in a co-production backed by Amal Clooney and Bob Geldof. It doesn't exist, but that's what they're after.

Finally, of course, I will lie about the cash. No returnee wants to admit to catastrophic losses up in Edinburgh and a spot of false accounting is perfectly acceptable. Here's the tell-tale sign that you're being fibbed to by a Fringe veteran with a newly acquired five grand overdraft. 'I broke even. Just!'

A History of Feminism (as told by a sexist pig) is on at the Space, Surgeons' Hall, Edinburgh, from 7 to 22 August, 19.20 p.m.

#### Music Orchestral infallibility Peter Phillips

Watching the Berlin Philharmonic going into conclave to choose a successor to Simon Rattle — after countless hours of secret discussion they have chosen Kirill Petrenko — reminds one of little less than the election of a pope. In both cases the expectation is the same: the organisations are so iconic that they must continue into the future without a hitch and without question. Whatever sort of job they are doing, or have done, they have become too much a part of normal life to be abolished.

Why is it that symphony orchestras of any standing are expected to survive indefinitely, where smaller musical organisations, though they may be just as established, are not? What are the long-term prospects for the Monteverdi Choir after John Eliot Gardiner retires? Or for Christopher Hogwood's Academy of Ancient Music - Hogwood has recently died, and a succession has taken place, but AAM is hardly being financed out of the public purse. The same could be asked of Trevor Pinnock's English Concert. The prognosis for professional choral ensembles is probably worse. What happened to the John Alldis Choir? What will happen to the Tallis Scholars? Are we all thought to be project ensembles, with a problem to solve and no shelf-life after we've solved it? One forgets that the great symphony orchestras were project ensembles once, until they became part of the establishment.

The irony is that becoming part of the establishment means that an ensemble is likely to have lost its original thrust. There is no other way: if it wants public financing it must appeal to the non-specialist, which means it must join the mainstream. From there it can only change direction with extreme caution, or be thought dangerously revolutionary. In this year's Proms what, in reality, will distinguish the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra's interpretation of Sibelius's Second Symphony (15 August) from the BBC Symphony Orchestra's version of Sibelius's Sixth and Seventh Symphonies (17 August)? I wager



'God wears a Rolex!'

almost nothing in the sound, and very little in anything else. To get a challengingly different view of the standard repertoire one needs to turn to a relatively recently formed ensemble, which at least began life by flashing two fingers at normality: the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment performing Brahms's First Symphony (1 September).

There's a lesson here, which the OAE might heed. The Berlin Philharmonic started in an almost identical way to them, almost exactly 100 years earlier — as a splinter group escaping from an existing organisation whose conductor they had grown tired of. In the case of the OAE, this was mainly Hogwood; in the case of the Berlin Philharmonic it was one Benjamin Bilse, and they duly called themselves 'The Former Bilse's Ensemble'. Soon they were the Phiharmonisches Orchester, a move towards respectability which went a long way towards guaranteeing their long-term survival. Where would the OAE like to be in 30 years' time? Still flying the flag of revolutionary interpretations and as likely as not struggling for cash; or witnesses of how their once-revolutionary ideas have been accepted by everyone around them, and recipients of reliable state funding?

The temptation to go for security must be almost irresistible. But if you want to try to juggle both — have money and challenge ideas — here is a check-list of dos and don'ts. Do try to have been founded in the 19th century. If you cannot manage this, do not resort to naming the ensemble after yourself — this is a cast-iron formula for putting an end-date on just about anything requiring public money. Remember the Reginald Jacques Orchestra? Or the Boyd Neel? This error was what dished the John Alldis Choir. Remember that if you are doing something really outlandish (aka mould-breaking and exciting), it will take longer for you to be accepted by the public at large, and certainly by politicians. You will have to take the long view on how influential your ideas are, and how long you are prepared to live on the edge while peddling them, with every chance of being forgotten at the end of the process anyway.

My third will sound like sour grapes, but is meant to apply widely: don't deal in singers who sing with no wobble. Whereas the non-specialist may nod smilingly at an ensemble they've never heard of made up of instrumentalists, singers who sing straight are too far off the beaten track at the moment for any hope of a vocal ensemble winning proper backing. The day may yet dawn when singing a cappella music in a stylish way is recognised to be as culturally desirable as performing symphonies. And indeed the acceptance of choral music as a viable secular art-form is slowly advancing, so one never knows. The future could be exciting. But for the present it's heads down, and keep the ideas coming.

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Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, until 27 September

## Larry Bell - 2D-3D: Glass & Vapor

White Cube, until 26 September

I learnt to splash about in watercolour at my grandmother's knee. Or rather, sitting beside her crouched over a pad of thickly 'toothed' paper and a Winsor & Newton paintbox on a wind-swept East Anglian seashore. Now, looking back, I see that what she was doing belonged to a tradition. Her predecessors, idols and reference points are to be seen in an admirable small exhibition at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, Watercolour — Elements of nature.

This consists of works from the museum's collection, but is much more full of delightful surprises — even for those who know the Fitzwilliam well — than that description suggests. The reason is that, while most British galleries own plenty of watercolours, you don't often see them because they are fragile. Exposed to light, the paper turns yellow and the colours fade.

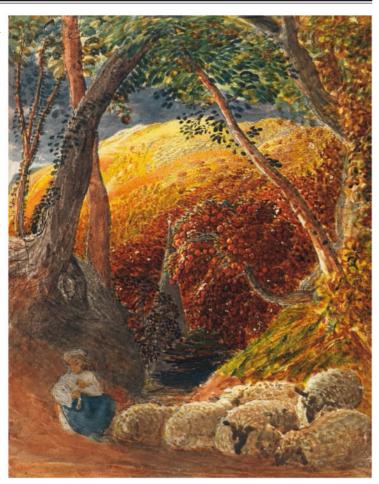
This is presumably why, although Samuel Palmer's 'The Magic Apple Tree', c. 1830, is one of the Fitzwilliam's most compelling possessions — a masterpiece of visionary rustic romanticism — it is not always to be seen on display. It is now, though, as are numerous pictures that I don't recall ever spotting in decades of visiting the Fitz.

These are not exclusively British — the selection includes French flower painting, impressionist and post-impressionist works — but a lot of them are. Watercolour became a national speciality in the late Georgian and Victorian eras. One reason sometimes advanced for this is that watercolour is perfectly adapted to the depiction of a climate that largely consists of differing degrees of wetness.

Turner's 'Shakespeare Cliff, Dover' (c. 1825) is a perfect case in point. It represents almost nothing solid. The chalk outcrop of the title is a ghostly presence consisting of a patch of white paper given form by a few faint veils of blue-grey wash. The rest of the picture is made up of varying intensity of the same: dark, almost black in places on the surface of a stormy sea and the clouds above. In the centre, the real centre of the picture, is a whirling vortex of lashing rain.

Of course, there is no single correct way to paint with watercolour. On show are diverse ways of using pigment diluted with water. Portrait miniatures — such as Nicholas Hilliard's 'Henry Percy' (c. 1595), an Elizabethan intellectual reclining in a flowery

Catch it while you can: Samuel Palmer's 'The Magic Apple Tree', c. 1830



meadow, open book behind him — are precisely detailed rather than loosely washy. So too are Ruskin's studies of rocks and leaves, as sharply focussed as a daguerreotype.

If desired, substances such as flour and gum could be added to make the colours thicker: Palmer and Cotman both did this. On the other hand, the watery medium does not suit those who prefer to build up layer after layer of pigment, revising and changing. Constable was a natural painter in oils; his

#### Bell has made a sort of sculpture from a rainbow: Turner would have been interested

watercolours, such as 'Windermere' (1806), while perfectly accomplished, don't seem truly him. Turner, conversely, seems most himself in watercolour.

Several paintings on show are almost Chinese in the way they conjure up a whole world with a few quick strokes of the brush. A sketch of a tree and hull of a boat at mooring by Peter De Wint (1784-1849) creates a riverbank and its reflection in the water below from one almost continuous but subtly inflected greenish blob: virtuoso fluidity.

Whistler's 'Grey and Silver — North Sea' (c. 1884) is close to not being there at all,

so faint are the pale washes that make up a maritime panorama, with just a sailing boat in the centre to anchor it in reality. Looking at it, I realised that this was the kind of effect my grandmother, trained at art school in the first part of the 20th century, must have been aiming at all those years ago.

Transparency is also the key to the art of Larry Bell, an American whose work is on show at White Cube, Mason's Yard, London SW1. Bell (b. 1939) is one of a number of Californian artists whose work is actually formed from those staple ingredients of so many pictures, light and space.

James Turrell, the best-known of these, uses light alone. Bell's output is typically a little more substantial, but not much. His most characteristic pieces are made from glass, specially coated both to reflect and absorb light so that their surfaces appear simultaneously there and not there.

On show at White Cube there are iridescent curvilinear shapes suspended in boxes, a maze of semi-transparent partitions, and a shelf placed in the corner of the room illuminated in such a way as to throw a double cone of light onto the wall, with multiple spectrums of colour like a butterfly's wing above it. In other words, Bell has made a sort of sculpture from a rainbow. Turner might have been interested.

## Dance Pulp fiction

Ismene Brown

### Matthew Bourne's The Car Man

Sadler's Wells, until 9 August

#### Ardani 25 Dance Gala

London Coliseum

Hot, languorous, sizzling... I was thinking what an ideal show Matthew Bourne's noir comedy is to watch on a summer's evening in T-shirt and shorts as you sip a cold beer in a plastic cup and feel all toasty while the garage mechanics are bumping and grinding away at Dino's Diner. Then the rain started chucking it down outside, the temperature fell, and I found myself ruminating on how a dance show feels different if you've just been watching it, rather than feeling it in your skin and body.

The great thing about Bourne's choreographic style is that it feels like something you might have done yourself during some summer in your life. It is not the kind of dance that is way beyond your pay grade, like some of the dancing by the ballet superstars in the Ardani gala at the weekend.

But while *The Car Man* is a show to quaff with enjoyment at the time, it doesn't have a very long finish in the mind. This is unlike several of Bourne's other productions. Partly that's because he is trying to pull off something like a sex farce in the first half, and then a film noir thriller in the second. If you don't ask the two parts to hang together, it's fine.

Having supped full on danced sex-simulations since the raunchy 1980s, I concede I'm probably more quickly jaded by the insistent copulation motif in *The Car Man*'s Act 1 ensembles, since there are not 69 variants, whatever they say. It's from the front, from the back, sideways or upside down, basically. And if the music's tempo doesn't allow for the normal need to start in first gear, followed by an accelerando and a post-coital pause while everyone considers whether to share a cigarette or to make a complaint, then you can feel as if you're witnessing a colony of rabbits rather than people.

Most spectators, however, haven't had the exposure I have and the audience went wild, and so perhaps will you. Subtitled 'Bizet's Carmen Re-Imagined', it is an ingenious thing. Bourne, who has attentive ears, took the percussive, stress-filled Rodion Shchedrin ballet-suite, which is of itself an ideal garage soundtrack, and cooked it up with the garage film noir, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. The sexually liberated tobacco queen is reborn as the amoral loner who strides into Lana's comatose trailer-trash marriage to arouse the demons of sexual appetite and turn her into a mythic murderer.

As you would expect, Bourne's devilish

lothario doesn't confine himself to ladies, and this allows for the melodramatic twist in which the crime is pinned on an innocent, allowing a different hero to take centre stage. He, if you like, is Don José, and part two is an expert embroidery on the opera plot; in particular, the way Bourne has developed his relationship with the Micaela figure in this revival has given the show some emotional depth. But it's a pity that Luca, the destructive intruder, loses his Luciferian menace and becomes just a gaudy low-lifer.

The old cars, neon signs and gas pumps, trailer trash vests and hot little dresses, zestfully designed by Lez Brotherston and lit by Chris Davey, make the stage great fun to look at. Composer Terry Davies lets out the tight seams of the Shchedrin serviceably — the original parts remain distinct — but overall the rhythms do hammer fairly heavily, as Bourne favours lots of thigh-smacking on the beat.

Pulp fiction for dance, then, but there are strong performances to relish, men in particular. On opening night the superbly irritable Alan Vincent, the original Luca in 2000, played Dino the cuckold, sweaty, heavy and cross, which is funny, given his resemblance to Bourne. Chris Trenfield cut an ideally louche Luca, delivering his sizzling opening solo with maximum danger, and Liam Mower was perfectly angelic as

Angelo, adding a creamy balletic grace to his wretched solo in handcuffs.

Bourne's ubiquity as the master of popular dance theatre is being threatened by his partner, Arthur Pita. Pita's black comedy for the former Bolshoi Ballet whizz kids Natalia Osipova and Ivan Vasiliev, *Facada*, was the highlight of the Russian-organised Ardani Dance Gala (just as Pita's was the best of Watson and Whelan at the Linbury the other week). His imagination is even cleverer than Bourne's, if in smaller parcels, and his glee knocked the spots off the effortful toilers Alastair Marriott and Marcelo Gomes, who'd made the other two ballets.

In Pita's joyfully evil little entertainment, a peculiar Portuguese minstrel (the matchless Frank Moon) wanders about while Osipova prepares breathlessly for a florid wedding to her lunkhead fiancé, Vasiliev, to the icv disapproval of her staggeringly elegant mother, Elizabeth McGorian. The tiffs are turned into electric dance. There are buckets of tears, really, and Osipova shows her brilliant comic gifts, as sobbing maiden becomes merciless maenad. Sadly, Vasiliev's part is mostly doltish, which he does much too well for his own good. But now I've got the indelible memory of one of the two greatest Spartacuses I've ever beheld rather unbelievably reincarnated in this stocky, contagiously amusing little office boy.



## Opera Welcome to Bedlam Anna Picard

#### Saul

Glyndebourne, in rep until 29 August

#### **Agrippina**

Iford Arts, until 5 August

Caius Gabriel Cibber's statues of 'Melancholy' and 'Raving Madness', their eyes staring blindly into the void, petrified in torment, once posed on top of the gate to Bedlam. In 1739, when Handel's dramatic oratorio *Saul* was first performed, you could pay a modest fee to pass beneath them and gawk at the living spectacles within, victims of 'arbitrary passions' including pride, lust and envy

In Barrie Kosky's Glyndebourne staging of Saul, Cibber's archetypes are animated and given voice by Christopher Purves as the king driven mad by 'Envy! Eldest born of Hell!' Saul was the second of Handel's great studies of madness. But where Orlando (1733) proposes a cure, restoring the hero to his senses after a sequence of florid scenes of delirium, Saul ends in disgrace, defeat and death. In Acts 1 and 2, Kosky's Israelites jabber and point like Bedlam's Georgian tourists. They're half-crazed by the opulent spoils (Dutch-Flemish floral arrangements, stuffed swans and peacocks, the smooth flanks of slaughtered deer) of their victory over the Philistines and the grotesque totem of the head of Goliath (designs by Katrin Lea Tag). Powdered, painted and periwigged, clad in silks of primrose, kingfisher, duck-egg blue, salmon pink and olive, they jump and scamper and gasp and squeal.

Their High Priest (Benjamin Hulett) is a monstrous jester in a ruff. The physicality of Kosky's movement direction and Otto Pichler's punk-baroque choreography of the six dancers is startling, especially in contrast with the stillness of Saul's champion and nemesis, David (Iestyn Davies), whose coolness and poise triggers love in the hearts of Michal (Sophie Bevan) and Jonathan (Paul Appleby), and hatred in the hearts of Merab (Lucy Crowe) and Saul. Sublimely sung by Davies, David remains an ambiguous, even dangerous figure in Kosky's reading, his motives mysterious, his sexuality apparently as fluid as his voice. Throughout, Joachim Klein's lighting design plays skilfully with ideas of artifice and nature, now flat and brilliant, now soft and dewy - contrasts mirrored in the voices, gestures and singing styles of Crowe and Hulett, and Bevan and Appleby.

There is an abundance of spectacle in the production, even an excess. In the Act 2 Symphony, a miniature organ concerto, organist James McVinnie plays on stage on



An abundance of spectacle: Iestyn Davies as David, with Sophie Bevan as Michal

a revolve that rises up from a battlefield lit by votive candles. On the first night, even the candles got a round of applause. But the gaudy grotesquerie dissolves when we are alone with Purves's Saul: stripped of his power, his clothes and his wig; muttering desperately to himself ('I'm the king! I'm the king! I'm the king! I'm the king!'); running around the bare earth; growling and howling his grand recitative ('Wretch that I am, of my own ruin author!'); birthing John

# For Handelian string playing of verve and vitality, head to Iford Manor

Graham-Hall's Witch of Endor and suckling noisily and greedily at her breast.

Here is Melancholy and Raving Madness, possession and a prophecy of defeat. It's a fearless performance from Purves, one that cracks the voice and wracks the heart, and is matched in its bravery by the young chorus. So why is the orchestral performance so pallid? Under Ivor Bolton's direction, the strings of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment play politely, still in oratorio mode, teetotalers at a bacchanalia. Obbligato solos for flute (Lisa Beznosiuk), harp (Frances Kelly) and carillon (described by one member of Handel's original audience as sounding like 'squirrels in a cage') spool out seductively, while the sackbuts and kettledrums work their dusty magic in the 'Dead March'. But too much of the playing is weak, dry and unambitious in its response

to what happens on stage.

For Handelian string playing of real vitality, rhythmic verve and dramatic engagement at point-blank range, head to the tiny cloisters in the gardens of Iford Manor where harpsichordist Christopher Bucknall directs an orchestra of 11 players in a vivacious account of Agrippina (1709). Here is articulation so smart that you could cut your finger on it, a rich tonal range and an abundance of exuberantly improvised decorations from leader Bojan Cicic. Designed by Kimm Kovac, Bruno Ravella's production of Handel's only Venetian opera is a thriftshop fantasy of the 1980s, half Jackie Collins novel, half John Hughes movie. There are perms, shoulder-pads, personal stereos, leotards, gold lamé and leg-warmers. There's even a hot-tub in the font.

Where Saul offers a moral lesson, Agrippina offers a farce of thwarted sexual desires and attempted assassinations. Alinka Kozari's chiselled cheekbones and chiselled coloratura combine to arresting effect in the shameless, scheming title role, while Ciara Hendrick dazzles as her son, the brattish Nerone. As nubile Poppea, Louise Kemeny deftly juggles the attentions of Nerone and Andrew Slater's lust-befuddled Claudio, saving her sweetest singing for the gorgeous Act 3 duet with Rupert Enticknap's smitten Ottone. Gareth Brynmor John, Tom Verney and Bradley Travis deliver the supporting roles of Pallante, Narciso and Lesbus with seedy flair.

#### **Television**

## Affairs in squares

James Walton

On all those comic lists of the world's shortest books (*Great Italian War Heroes, My Hunt for the Real Killers*, by O.J. Simpson etc.), the best title I ever came across was *Bloomsbury: the Untold Story*. Now, though, BBC2's new drama, *Life in Squares*, is giving us yet another chance to marvel at how many sexual permutations one small group of people can achieve.

But before all that began, Monday's first episode was at some pains to show us the forces of Victorian stuffiness against which the Bloomsbury group rebelled. In the first scene, a suitor tried to woo Vanessa Stephen with the chat-up line, 'Only two more days, Miss Stephen, to the opening of the trout-fishing season.' In the second, Vanessa understandably denounced the 'dead conversation, dead habits' surrounding her and her sister Virginia, and flung her corset out of her bedroom window with a hearty cry of 'Freedom!' And just in case that wasn't clear enough, she then told her black-clad and endlessly disapproving Aunt Mary to leave the house, because 'we intend to live in our own wav'.

In other words, the programme takes the Bloomsburyites entirely on their own terms, as heroic battlers for modernity against suffocating convention. It's a perfectly defensible point of view admittedly, but not one that here makes for an especially compelling watch. Instead, *Life in Squares* presents its case for how admirable these people were with such plodding care that much of the dialogue is in the form of rather stilted intellectual exposition, and the people speaking it seem more like interesting sociological specimens than interesting dramatic characters.

On Monday, the gay trio (and sometimes triangle) of Duncan Grant, Lytton Strachey and John Maynard Keynes went dutifully about the business of what Strachey called 'the higher sodomy' — which, to be honest, didn't appear all that different from any other kind. Virginia looked suitably wan and neurasthenic, while also keeping us up to date on her early career ('the *Times Literary Supplement* have asked me to write another review'). The main character, however, is Vanessa, who after the death of her brother Thoby, finally accepted one of Clive Bell's repeated proposals of marriage.

At first, all went well — 'I am in heaven here with Clive,' she wrote to Virginia from a trip abroad. 'Copulation continues to be a tremendous success.' But after the birth of baby Julian left Clive feeling neglected, he gave his wife's freethinking ways their first big test by confessing that he was now sleeping with his old flame Mrs Raven Hill. For-

tunately, it was a test that Vanessa passed with some aplomb. 'I don't think either of us should be hemmed in or unhappy just because we're married,' she replied — before rewarding his honesty with a vigorous bout of presumably successful copulation.

Of course, *Life in Squares* does have the distinct advantage that the story of Bloomsbury is certainly not dull. Yet, if the series is properly to catch fire, it needs to go beyond merely endorsing the Bloomsburyites' world view and to introduce a few dissenting voices that are a lot more convincing than Aunt Mary's. Otherwise, it might well turn out that for a TV viewer, bohemian conformity can be just as stuffy and suffocating as any other type.

Meanwhile, the week's other new BBC drama series took an even more well-worn path — by adapting Agatha Christie for television. In *Partners in Crime* (BBC1, Sunday), David Walliams and Jessica Raine play Tommy and Tuppence Beresford — the stars of five Christie books — as a sort of 1950s crime-solving equivalent of Terry and June: he, massively impractical, occasionally pompous and with a habit of knocking things over; she, highly competent, always supportive and only ever exasperated with her husband in the most benign possible way.

In this version, mind you, the couple stumbled into the crime-solving part by accident — or, if you prefer, by a series of wild coincidences involving a chance meeting with a young woman on a train and the fact that Tommy's uncle Carter works for the intelligence services and was willing to pluck the Beresfords from their bee-keeping business to help him find a Russian killer. ('A secret assassin, a missing girl, a communist plot,' as Tuppence put it by way of helpful summary.)

In theory, *Partners in Crime* should be somewhere between a disappointment and a car crash: the plot is full of holes and the characters are an eerily familiar mix of cricket-loving establishment types, gruff cockney villains and men who demonstrate how rich they are by saying, 'I'm a very rich man.' In practice, the programme goes about its work with such shameless conviction (but without any of the earnestness of, say, *Life in Squares*) that it already feels like an established and enjoyable piece of Sunday-night froth.



'Dad, Dad — I'm homophobic.'

# Theatre Family matters Lloyd Evans

#### **The Gathered Leaves**

Park Theatre, until 15 August

#### **Richard II**

Globe Theatre, until 18 October

God, what a title. *The Gathered Leaves*. It sounds like a tremulous weepie about grief and endurance with a closing scene featuring three anvil-faced spinsters staring through the rectory window at an autumn bonfire. It's not quite like that.

The play opens with some clumsy exposition revealing the political chronology. It's Easter, 1997, and Labour's shiny-fanged messiah is about to evict the Brixton mule from Downing Street. We meet the Pennington family, a high Tory clan nestling in a frondy corner of the Thames Valley, who are eager to heal an ancient rift. Their estranged daughter and her mixed-race sprog have been skulking in France for the past 17 years. They're coming back. But when they return to the bosom of the family they get the bazooka. Grumpy old William, outraged that the arrivals have delayed his supper, blasts them with a spurt of ice-cold rage. It's a horrible and fascinating start.

The play evolves into a masterful portrait of sophisticated posh folk coping with an interlocking series of crises. Horrid old William (played by Clive Francis) softens up a bit and manages to bond with his grand-daughter over a litre of single malt. Adult siblings, Emily and Simon, bicker and peck at each other like an elderly married couple. Matriarchal Olivia (Jane Asher) watches over her sparring brood with a taut, weary smile. What raises the melodrama above the commonplace is the relationship between the middle-aged brothers.

Giles is a sleek but unhappily married doctor whose role in the family is to defend and protect his autistic brother. Samuel has a sky-high IQ and a puppyish, saintly personality. His interests are childishly random. He immerses himself in novels for hours on end and he loves to observe and collect ladybirds which he exhibits to passers-by with an explanatory lecture about their breeding habits. He's like a grown-up baby, incapable of lying, and unaffected by psychological calculation. His company and his conversation are entirely weaponless so he becomes a haven for the troubled adults who seek him out as a restful alternative to their world of tiffs, battles, plots and alliances.

Writer Andrew Keatley draws this border-line genius with great skill and he avoids the smallest hint of preachiness or sentimentality. Nick Sampson plays the man-child with irresistibly geeky charm. The show's

only fault is that it's designed as a TV script with a great clomping caravan of scenes bumping nose to tail against each other. The theatre prefers a smoother, more integrated structure. That said, the script could become a film without too many changes. And it wouldn't be hard to find the money since the luvvie playing Samuel would be guaranteed a nomination for best actor. Hollywood can't resist a posh Brit battling disability. Some have tipped the show for the West End but I suspect the backers will opt for a stately progress around the Home Counties first to test box-office demand. Suitcases out, chaps. Travelodge beckons.

Richard II is the tragedy of a man in the wrong job. Richard would have made a fine, if unremarkable monarch in an era of peace and plenty, but his misfortune was to rule at a time of war and want. The play has an exceptionally wide emotional palette. It's savage, brutal and tragic, but also sweet, winsome and funny, with moments of pure slapstick. Amazingly, all these moods and registers are encompassed within the title character, so playing Richard is a matter of percentages. Most actors can get some of it. None can get all of it. Charles Edwards is a light-comedy specialist and he gives the king a chat-show air as he gads about in a gold, ankle-length kaftan and lounges on his throne snapping cheerfully at his noblemen. Even when he attains the heights of majesty he sounds a bit Graham Norton. 'I was not born to sue but to command,' he winks, as if it were a one-liner.

He's at his best during the tragicomic submission scene where the king gives up and then retracts the crown. The rhythm of the lines make it unfailingly funny and Edwards delivers the goods here. He's well supported by a cold, brooding David Sturzaker who brings a hint of Jack Nicholson to the thankless role of Bolingbroke.

As the tragedy deepens Edwards seems less in tune with the character. He captures the sadness of the broken king but he gives us melancholy without grandeur, nightfall without mystery. If you buy tickets arrive on time or you'll miss an outstanding John of Gaunt. William Gaunt (no relation) has one of those rich, smoky, claret-steeped voices that steal up on actors in their mellower years. If the oboe had a mating call it would sound like this.



'I don't get it — my owner can't get enough of that stuff either.'



You can't keep your eyes off Iris

#### Cinema

# Dedicated follower of fashion

Deborah Ross

luic

Key cities, 12A

Iris is a documentary portrait of Iris Apfel, the nonagenarian New York fashion icon. Nope, me neither, but that's irrelevant, as all you truly need know is she is a joy, a wonder, and terrific, as is this film. It's the final work of documentary film-maker Albert Maysles, who died last year, at 88, and although Iris obviously loves the camera, and plays to the camera, and it is often Iris doing Iris, as Iris does Iris so brilliantly, who cares? Also, you just can't take your eyes off her. You can't.

The opening shots show Iris, who is 93, in her Park Avenue apartment, in all her glory. Accessories make an outfit, is a fashion tip often proffered, but why make an outfit, when you can blast it out of the water? That seems to be Iris's thinking, I would say, and she works it even though you wouldn't imagine it possible. The outfits are madly patterned, or stripes layered upon stripes. They are hand-painted Versace, or vintage Valentino, or one-off Dior. But blasted they are, by the bangles that clank up to her elbows, the several statement necklaces worn simultaneously, and the glasses so oversized they make Edna Mode's (from The Incredibles; do look her up) seem small fry, if not pathetic. She gets dressed, she says, as if she's playing jazz! 'Try this, try that...' She also says: 'The best thing isn't going to a

party or being at a party it is getting dressed for a party.' She gives good one-liners. 'Whatever I have two of, one of them hurts,' is how she describes old age, but that only made me think she'd got off lightly. I'm not yet 93 but whatever I have two of, both hurt, and whatever I have one of, that hurts too.

Maysles — pronounced to rhyme with 'hazels', if that is of interest — is as much her co-collaborator as anything. She often addresses him directly. He is occasionally in shot. They are in this together, as he follows her to African bead shops in Harlem, and she flits between her various apartments, or visits the warehouse where she stores all her amazing stuff, or attends fashion functions where she is fawned over, and fawns right back. (Some of these fashion moments are a bit icky, I must confess.)

Her story is told incidentally, as and when. She is Jewish, half-Russian, was raised in Brooklyn, or so I gathered, to a mother who also worshiped at the altar of accessories. 'No one could tie a scarf like my mother,' Iris says proudly. She was herself obsessed from a young age, saving 65 cents for her first brooch, and would wander the aisles of Loehmann's, the department store where, she remembers, Mrs Loehmann would sit on a high stool, like a tennis umpire, surveying everyone in the shop. One time Mrs Loehmann called her over to tell her she'd never be pretty, but she had something better than that: she had style.

She married Carl Apfel in 1948, and together they set up an interior design and textile business, which saw them criss-crossing the world and working at the White House for several presidents and also getting stinking rich, from the look of it. Carl

celebrates his 100th birthday on screen. He adores her. 'It's been a beautiful trip,' he says. She adores him. They never had children as she didn't want any — 'I wanted a career, I wanted to travel... you can't have everything' — but they may be each other's children. Their Palm Springs apartment is packed with weird toys and Christmas decorations that are never taken down.

Although it's mostly Iris doing Iris, and Iris lapping up attention and Iris dispensing her own tips ('black isn't style; black is a uniform'), Maysles, which still rhymes with 'hazels', does gently peel her back a little. In particular, we see her increasing frailty, when she lets it slip that worrying about her health keeps her awake nights, and we also see what it is to love someone and be married to them for 66 years. Iris falls and breaks a hip. Carl knows about the fall. An ambulance comes. But the hip? She won't tell him about that. He'll only get upset.

What is Iris Apfel? Performance art? Living history? A walking, talking lesson in how to keep doing what you do, even in to old age, if you still get a buzz from it? I don't know. Like I said, I know only you can't take your eyes of her. You truly can't.

# Radio Matters of life and death Kate Chisholm

Bait by Cartier,' she growls as her priceless diamond bracelet is strapped to a piece of rope and dropped overboard in the hope it might lure a fish on to the line. She's stuck on a boat with a group of survivors after the freighter she was aboard was hit by a German U-boat during the second world war. She was Tallulah Bankhead, playing Connie, heroine of John Steinbeck's novel-cum-film *Lifeboat*, for *Mystery Theater*, the American radio drama series, first broadcast in 1950 and now replayed on Radio 4 Extra (Sunday).

They just don't make voices like that anymore. It had star quality streaked right through it. That deep husky tone, the raucous laugh, the harsh put-down veering almost at once into a sensual come-on. I was hooked from the first word, even though the dialogue was pretty terrible ('Some of my best friends are in concentration camps'). The film from which the radio script was taken was made right in the middle of the war and when a survivor from the submarine is brought on to the boat, the anti-German propaganda just gets embarrassing.

But it was so vivid. No question. I could have been sitting on an itchy red velour cinema seat in an old-fashioned double-aisle cinema, watching Bankhead and co tossing on an alien sea. The sound effects were dreadful—great sploshes of water, whirling wind,

flapping sails — yet the image of Bankhead, draped in a mink coat, tapping out her latest report for her newspaper, was so immediate, so compelling.

It was vintage, in both senses. Incredibly old-school yet at the same time a classic example of radio theatre, the drama all conveyed in the voice, the interaction between the characters, and in this case the sweeping strings of the soundtrack. It was intriguing, though, how every 15 minutes or so the voices were allowed simply to fade away as the next advert break became necessary. I couldn't help thinking this might be the future for Radio 4, if the government has its way and the licence fee is replaced by some other form of funding. Plays broken up, tension interrupted, by ads for dentures and health insurance.

It would also be unlikely in such a brave new radio world to hear programmes like *Inside the Ethics Committee* (Radio 4, Saturday night). The title itself is hardly gripping, yet it never fails to engage, as Joan Bakewell and her expert guests explore some of the most testing ethical questions faced by the medical profession. Not, though, in isolation from everyday life. Each programme takes a case study and delves into the questions it raises. Not at all the *Moral Maze*, because it's never combative, although often full of troubling contradictions. This is life-and-death, as could be faced by any one of us and the medics trying to treat us.

This week their topic was suicide: how far should a medical team go to prevent a young woman from killing herself. Their case study was 22-year-old Samantha, who has tried to kill herself several times, on one occasion causing so many injuries she had to relearn how to walk. She's become obsessed by internet suicide forums, spending every waking

moment 'chatting' to others about their wish to die. Every day is a challenge to keep her alive, for her distraught family and the mental-health team. Yet she always appears calm, clear and articulate. She had, as the medical team determined, 'capacity' to think for herself, to make decisions. Confusingly, though, she has been repeatedly sectioned by them to keep her safe. As Professor Deborah Bowman explained, 'I want to understand her "capacity" much more... Have all the available treatment options been considered?'

This was as gripping as any drama because, although on the surface it was a discussion between medical and legal experts, at the heart of it was Samantha's plight. Would she, could she, be helped? In the end it was family therapy that allowed a chink of light to enter her desperate situation. 'I'm very lucky to get out of it alive,' she said. 'They did everything they could to protect me.' (The producer was Beth Eastwood.)

On the World Service on Tuesday, *The Documentary* took us to New Zealand and the tiny libraries that are found in even the smallest communities, established for decades and now just as much social centres as homes for books. Julie Shapiro first came across them in 1998 when she hitched through the country taking odd jobs on farms in return for bed and board. In Waipiata she read Herman Hesse, proof of which still survives in an old notebook from that time.

The libraries tell a mini-history of New Zealand itself, says Shapiro and her copresenter Miyuki Jokiranta. Isolated and sometimes very small, with no more than 35 members, they are far-ranging in content and imagination. At Waipiata the keys to the library are kept behind the bar of the local pub. But will they still be there in 20 years' time?

#### Growing Up

This morning, as I commuted through Hendon Central, I remembered you telling me you saw that day's newspaper there on a board, announcing the king had died, how life stalled for a moment. This evening I got the call I'd long dreaded, telling me you were dead. 'We are not a grandchild,' Thatcher might have said. My kingdom has lost its last queen. I grow tall into the footsteps of each late centenarian grandmother, may start taking The Telegraph. I cry, then hear both of them laugh with an obstinacy that skipped a generation, realise I'm now their only resurrection, have crossed the chess board, no longer a pawn.

#### NOTES ON ...

# Glasgow

By Claudia Massie

wet walk in a Glaswegian graveyard might not be your idea of fun, but then you might not have spent the past two hours in the Glasgow Science Centre. Endure that, and see the sodden Necropolis stroll swell in allure.

The Science Centre is one of the emblems of the new Glasgow. Rising from the old docklands on the south side of the Clyde, beside the BBC at Pacific Quay, it is one of the shouty new buildings leading the regeneration of the old shipbuilding areas. These buildings and their outlying friends still look like awkward blow-ins here, isolated blobs of glitter studding the wasteland. There's not yet much sense of any connection with Govan Road, 200 yards to the west, but people are certainly coming here from somewhere for something, and in their multitudes.

The Science Centre is a vogueish sort of place that encourages absolutely everything except contemplation. It screams fun at its visitors, especially children, who are duped into thinking they are in a play park and who behave accordingly. My four-year-old kept asking to go on the bouncy castle even though, quite surprisingly, there wasn't one. Instead we put him through the face-ageing machine. It took his photo and then revealed how appalling he will look in ten years' time



Look homeward, angel: Glasgow Necropolis

if he chooses to spend the decade boozing, and how much worse he'll look if he's been on the fags as well. Salutary larks.

Meanwhile, a lunatic press of children with green mohicans and replica football shirts yank levers, spin magnets, measure their heartbeats and twist hyperboloids for a few seconds apiece before dashing to the next attraction. The amount of scientific knowledge gleaned from these interactions is evidently zero but everyone seems to be having a splendid time. Or almost everyone.

I despise the mania, but I have our trip to the Necropolis to look forward to. When the time comes to drag the happy boy from the plastinated lung display, he collapses in protest and screams, awkwardly and repeatedly, 'I don't want to go to the graveyard!' Nevertheless, to the graveyard he went and, as it turns out, he had even more fun there because it was raining and it was a big wet hill full of wet trees and wet puddles and the quiet threat of ghosts.

If the Science Centre represents Glasgow's lumbersome transition from shipyard to faux-educational pleasure dome, the Necropolis still stands for the might of the Second City of the Empire. Built around 1831 on a hill behind the cathedral, this 32-acre site hosts the bones of some 50,000 Glaswegians. Bold Victorian Glasgow is represented here among many magnificent tombs, some designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh or Alexander 'Greek' Thomson.

The Necropolis is essential Glasgow. With its greenery, quiet, and roaming views, the city of the dead remains a blessed foil to the urban thrum below and, while elsewhere the city's heritage is erased, here at least old Glasgow will endure.

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People who would pay £10 a month just for Radio 4 resent the licence fee because they don't like Graham Norton

— Rory Sutherland, p53

# LIFE

### High life Taki



We all agree that a world without manners would make this a pretty grim place to live. Offensive informality is pretty much accepted nowadays, and manners are at times seen as a superficial activity. But good manners are as much a part of our culture as great books, great paintings and great classical music. At times, of course, one can carry good manners too far.

My friend Timmy, a gent and a gem of a man, has exquisite manners, a couple of titled daughters, and likes to drink beer. He never fails to thank his host or hostess, and makes it a habit to thank them in print. Not so long ago, perhaps five to ten years, he convinced a friend of his, a speechwriter for the Tory party, to allow him to serve as a waiter at an orgy. Yes, I know, it sounds funny, but even Tories like sex and some of them even have orgies. Not to labour the point, Timmy dressed up as a butler and was given a tray and allowed into the inner sanctum of a grand London house where the gig was on. The moment he walked in, however, he burst out laughing, dropped his tray and was unceremoniously shown the door by a couple of naked men with drooping you-know-whats. When I heard about it, I asked Timmy what the hell was wrong with him. 'I simply couldn't keep a straight face,' he said, 'watching a naked man with a huge erection demanding to know the host's name in order to thank him made me drop the tray.' 'So who was the host?' I asked. Timmy wouldn't tell me, but I soon found out, in a national newspaper, of all places. He was a Tory speechwriter, and he organised heterosexual orgies on the side, but has since stopped the practice. I know the man well. They don't come any smarter or nicer. Go figure, as they say.

The thing that sticks in my mind is the impeccable manners of the man with the huge erection trying to locate his host in order to thank him. I'm afraid had I been in Timmy's place I most likely would have done the same. I think Julian Fellowes should include a similar scene whenever he writes

the next *Downton Abbey*, it would make for verisimilitude and make those nobs he venerates and writes about a bit more believable. Mind you, bad manners can also ricochet at times, as happened in my case around 20 or so years ago.

My childhood friend Atalanta Goulandris was getting married to Stephan Griparis at a grand Athens wedding in her house, in a northern suburb of the capital. Atalanta was a barrister and had invited hundreds of law types from merry old England. Needless to say, the booze flowed uninterruptedly, the music and the dancing went on until dawn, and somewhere in between I was asked to say a few words to her guests. I was well in my cups and stood up on a stage and welcomed them. I then announced that for their benefit there would be doggie bags provided to get them through their Grecian stay. The British contingent cheered. I then praised the newlyweds and reminded the visitors that while we Greeks were inventing democracy, building the Parthenon, writing tragedy, practicing philosophy and understanding the cosmos in general, the Brits were scratching their furry parts and eating roots. The grandfather of the bride, a wonderfully old-fashioned gentleman, thought it the rudest thing he'd ever heard. 'These are our guests, and they are foreigners to boot,' he told me.

Never mind. Brits are known for their sense of humour and back then their food was nothing to write home about. For days afterwards, however, whenever I'd run into an English contingent scrounging around an Athenian beach, they'd ask me where the doggie bags were. Well, guess who needs doggie bags nowadays, it's us Greeks, no ifs or buts about it. But quickly back to orgies.

About 30 years or so ago, I was asked to speak to the law society of Oundle School. I suppose it was because I had lost four libel



'I love the work you pass off as yours.'

cases in a row, and the society must have thought I was an expert. My only advice was as follows: if you are defending, and the plaintiff looks like someone who would make love to his wife in an orgy, settle immediately. Otherwise go to the bitter end.

It is bad manners, of course, to write about such things as orgies, but it beats writing about celebrities, or what passes for a celebrity in these plebeian days. Manners matter, even if they can be fatal, according to a *Telegraph* writer. Gerald Warner has written that Britons are more endangered because of their hat-tipping tendency to stand aside while brash foreigners extricate themselves from tricky situations. Warner is obviously of a certain age, because there are very few hat-tipping Brits around.

My favourite story about manners is that of an old lady dining in a grand Parisian house and feeling herself dying. 'Quick, bring the dessert,' she told the footman. She was not overcome by greed. She simply wished to hurry the dinner along so as not to drop dead before the party rose from the table. Now that's what I call good manners, perhaps less funny than the man with the huge erection trying to locate his host in an orgy, but infinitely superior.

# **Low life**Jeremy Clarke



After Trev had mugged the mugger in the toilet we moved quickly on to another club. The Double O is frankly a horrible place, but it stays open later than any of the others, and is only a bracing ten-minute walk along the seafront. As was usual on the walk between Mandy's and the Double O, salt air plus who knows how many house doubles equalled intoxication squared. Halfway there I took off my cashmere and silk charity-shop pullover and gave it to Trev to put on to hide the bloodstains on his shirt. It was several sizes too small for him and he needed my help getting into it. We tried to get his head into an armhole for a long time before realising our mistake. From a distance it must have looked

like we were having a set-to. We got his head through the correct opening at last, then I had to stretch the fabric to nearly breaking point to get it over his shoulders and his barrel of a torso.

Trev is on good terms with the doormen at the Double O. In his younger days he used to work on the doors and he has always been proud of that. He has a fund of anecdotes. Their moral is usually that the work of a doorman is basically pacifism tempered by thuggery. Because the Double O stays open later than anywhere else, the people who go there are drunker and more prone to violence than anywhere else we go, and the bouncers bouncier. We like going there very much. Before we go in, Trev always stops and has a fraternal chat with the lads and tells them that if they need a hand at any point to give him a shout.

As we approached the squalid doorway in the parade of shops that is the club's only entrance, we saw that tonight it was being supervised by three bouncers. 'Look at them,' said Trev. 'Tweedledum, Tweedledee and Tweedletwat.' A kind of hellish pandemonium reigned on the pavement outside the club and in the road. Police were bundling a struggler into the back of a van. The doormen had a full-time job controlling the crowd of drunks wanting to get in, while letting out those inside who wanted to come out to smoke

But when we applied to them for admission, Trev, as a recognised former member of the local doorman community, and wearing a silk and cashmere V-necked jumper that was beyond skintight, barely reaching his navel and on back to front, it was all brotherly love and hipster handshakes. Then he took one of the bouncers aside and had a word in the guy's Cro-Magnon-size ear. 'Me and Jerry here have just come from Mandy's,' he yelled above the tumult, which included female screams, 'and we've had a bit of trouble.'

The bouncer was listening but staying on his mettle. His gimlet eyes were darting hither and thither. Here the eyes flickered quickly over me and for a brief moment his expression of stern vigilance softened to something between irony and surprise. Trev explained to him what had happened to his phone and to the bloke who had tried to steal it. 'So if you see a bloke trying to get in here with the end of his nose looking a bit chewed,' he said, 'or with a bandage on it, and he looks seriously upset, don't let him in. Because if he comes in, it's going to seriously kick off in there, and you look like you're busy enough already.'

The doorman's eyes were elsewhere, but he was interested — or at least half interested — in what Trev was saying. He wasn't surprised however. Biting off the tips of other people's noses might not be cricket, his barely perceptible nods of understanding seemed to be saying, but very often one was left with little or no alternative. Finally Trev gave him a description of the guy. The doorman thanked him for the helpful warning. That was Trev all

over, I thought, to present a boast as a help-ful warning.

The doorman motioned to another gorilla standing just inside that Trev and I could go through without paying at the ticket window. The Double O is nothing more than a long, seedy bar with a raised wooden dance floor at the end. It's an evil place but the music's great. I went straight on to the packed dance floor and asked the DJ if he had any Rod Stewart and he said he'd have a look. Then Trev came on to the dance floor looking panic-stricken. 'Dude — where's my phone?' he shouted. I told him to go away. He laughed in my face. Then he let his head drop and did his dead crow on a gamekeeper's gibbet swinging in the wind dance.

### **Real life** Melissa Kite



'No, I do not do WhatsApp.' That's pretty much all I ever seem to say to people now-adays. They ask me if I do WhatsApp, I say I don't do WhatsApp and they never bother with me again.

I deduce from this that not only can we not now meet in person (so 80s), we cannot talk on the mobile phone either (so 90s), and nor can we email each other (so noughties). We have to do WhatsApp.

I don't know what WhatsApp is and I cannot bring myself to find out. In answer to the next person who asks, I say: WtfApp! WhocaresApp?! GetalifeApp!!

I was full up with pointless technology when I got as far as using an iPhone. So befuddled am I by dictating incoherent text messages into its voice recognition function, I cannot possibly start logging onto instant messaging sites or downloading apps that will get me into trouble — because I always get into trouble when I try to do digital jiggery-pokery.

The social networking is bad enough. They should never let people like me on Facebook. There ought to be a screening process at the log-in stage, like parental control, to stop emotionally unstable women in their mid-forties from posting 'status updates'.

I've managed to get myself estranged from one family member and two dear former friends by shooting my mouth off on Facebook. And each time, all I did was say what I thought instead of posting some dreary garbage about how great I thought they were, or how wonderful their picture of their dinner was.

Note: if a Facebook friend posts that they are clinically depressed and then remarks that they are off out to get drunk, again, you are supposed to say: 'Oh no, you poor thing! I know the heartache. There are angels in heaven looking down on you. Remember you're amazing! Huge hugs! Xxxxxx' — plus a smiley. You are not supposed to post: 'Don't get drunk you idiot, alcohol's a depressant.' Because then your so-called FB friend will unfriend you, and report you to the administrator for trolling.

Obviously, I don't dare go on Twitter. I posted a photo of my new car on there once and even that prompted a deluge a complaints.

I have to face facts. I don't give good digital. Imagine the carnage if I started downloading apps?

People should be grateful I'm not on WhatsApp, given my propensity for disaster. And yet they seem baffled by my lack of apptitude — you see what I did there? The other day a friend asked, 'So, if you don't do apps, how on earth do you order a taxi?'

I'll tell you how. I go out into the street and raise my arm. This is known as Going-outsideApp. Otherwise, I pick up Alexander Graham Bell's exceedingly good telephonic device (yes, I have a land-line) and place a call to the earthly headquarters of Balham's finest minicab emporium, a procedure known as HelloMelissamylovelyyouwannacarmylove?App.

No. I cannot and must not do new technology. I recently joined Airbnb, the site where

# Unstable women in their mid-forties should not post 'status updates'

you rent a room to a tourist, and got myself digitally lynched by a man who wanted me to give him seven nights for the price of five and then told me a few hours before he arrived that 'by the way' he would be bringing his five-year-old child.

I told him to get lost, because that is what you would do normally. I made the mistake of thinking you can socially network someone as you would talk to them. Online, however, you are meant to couch every utterance in hand-wringing political correctness.

'How dare you speak to me like that!' he declared in a message to my Airbnb inbox, before reporting me to the administrators, who gave me the most polite, Americanised telling off I have ever had.

'Your guest recently reached out to us and communicated that he had to cancel his reservation as the listing no longer met his needs,' said the sunny email of admonishment from the customer experience team. 'As you know, Airbnb is a platform that connects two humans as members of a community. I am hoping that this will be a learning experience for both parties involved.' Yes. Lesson learned. Don't go on Airbnb.

Then there was the slow car crash that

unfolded when I joined match.com. Oh dear. I think I had better save that for another day.

But suffice to say, all the men I reached out to and communicated with replied by asking me to join them on WhatsApp.

'I don't do WhatsApp!' I said to one.

A few hours later another one said: 'You don't do WhatsApp?'

'Are you people all sitting in a room together plotting to make me miserable?' He didn't reply. I suppose I sounded paranoid.

# Long life Alexander Chancellor



I was wondering what to write about this week when I suddenly realised that exactly 40 years ago this Saturday I became editor of this magazine. Despite eventually getting the sack, I hung onto the job for nine years, from 1975 to 1984, which is still the longest that anyone has had it since Wilson Harris ended his 21-year tenure in 1953. *The Spectator* has had 15 editors since him, but none apart from myself has lasted for much more than six years. Fraser Nelson, however, looks set to outlast us all.

I am surprised how little I can remember of those years (or perhaps I shouldn't be surprised, given my drinking habits at the time), but I will never forget how they started. Henry (now 'Sir Henry') Keswick, back from 14 years in Hong Kong in a hereditary role as head of the great trading house of Jardine Matheson, bought *The Spectator* as a way of re-establishing himself in Britain and possibly helping him to get selected as a Conservative candidate for a seat in Parliament.

If he failed in this second objective, it was probably because he chose as editor someone with no experience of politics and without any useful political connections. That was me; and the only reason he chose me, Max Hastings wrote at the time in the *Evening Standard*, was that I was 'the only journalist he knew'. I had known Henry since childhood; his father was my father's best friend; his mother was my godmother; we had been at both school and university together. So, yes, he knew me; but it was nevertheless bold of him to entrust the loss-making *Spectator* to someone so unqualified for the task.

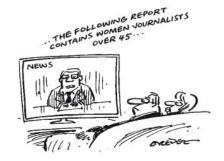
I had been a journalist for the previous 11 years, nearly all of them at Reuters, most of which I had spent abroad as a correspondent, first in Paris and then Rome. But I wasn't just ignorant of British politics; I knew nothing of literary London or of the people who

frequented it. I had read the *New Statesman* a bit in my youth, but never *The Spectator*. I had never voted Conservative. Nobody but Henry could possibly have chosen me for the job.

I also had serious doubts about accepting it. When I decided to do it, it was basically for two reasons. The first was that I thought that even I could make it more acceptable to its natural readership. It was visually crude and had become, prior to the in-out referendum on Europe of June, 1975, a strident, one-issue journal, devoted almost exclusively to campaigning in favour of withdrawal from the European Economic Community. It was performing a useful function, for it was almost alone in the British media in advocating this; but I felt that its decline in circulation — then down to a miserable 13,000 or less — was largely attributable to its gracelessness and its hectoring manner. It is as if the current Spectator, facing another referendum on Europe in the next couple of years, were to be a sort of house organ of Ukip.

My second reason was my reverence for Harold Ross, the founding editor in the 1920s of the New Yorker, the greatest magazine to be created in the 20th century. I would not dream of comparing myself to him, who was a sort of genius, in any respect except one: he, like me, had no literary background and had previously been no more than a news reporter on various American newspapers before becoming editor of an army journal for US servicemen in France during the first world war. But his unashamed ignorance of almost everything (most famously 'Moby Dick. Was that the man or the whale?') led him to query anything in an article that he didn't know or understand, and this is something that I think editors should never be embarrassed to do. It's a service to similarly ill-informed readers, and it's amazing what waffle it can expose.

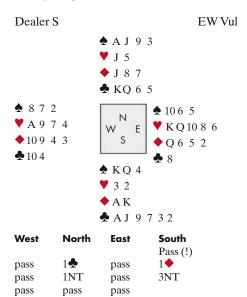
Anyway, I spent nine years losing poor old Henry substantial sums of money until even he, patient though he was, got fed up and sold the magazine. He is, however, the person who saved it. We did eventually turn it round, but with the speed of a giant oil tanker changing course. If he had been less patient, it might have died. And the recovery was not only slow, but also modest. By the time I left the circulation was still only about 20,000, much less than a third of what it is now. We have my successors to thank for making it the success story it is today.



### **Bridge** Susanna Gross

Imagine going to a golf tournament and finding yourself competing against Rory McIlroy; or a tennis match and facing Roger Federer. That's the wonderful thing about bridge: turn up to any open international event and there they are, up close, the superstars of the game — playing against you!

I recently spent a gruelling seven days at the Open European Championships in Tromso (Norway), playing in the mixed teams and pairs with David Gold (we reached the A final of the pairs but then floundered). Each time we competed against a champion — be it Geir Helgemo or Sabine Auken or Philippe Cronier — I felt such a sense of privilege. But beware: too much awe can distract you. Which is why this week's hand has no merit except to serve as a warning. Don't end up making a fool of yourself, as South did when West sat down at the table. West was the legendary Helgemo. South was me:



I deny passing! Or rather, let me explain. A few minutes previously, Helgemo and his partner had joined our table, and he and I had been joking about how cold it was in the Arctic Circle. Then I picked up the South hand. I opened 1. But when the bidding tray came back from the other side of the table, I looked down and saw my partner had responded... 1♣. Somehow I had placed the green pass card on the tray. I turned to Helgemo. 'I've got a serious bidding problem,' I said, 'and even you won't be able to guess what it is.' I decided to bid 1♦ — which I felt was least likely to be passed out. David responded 1NT, showing 12-14 points. I bid 3NT. 'Wow,' said Helgemo, when I put dummy down. 'That's the best dummy from a passed hand I've ever seen.' 3NT was off on a heart lead (5♣ or 5♠ makes). But you can't say I didn't make an impression.

## Chess Stormy Petroff Raymond Keene

Alexander Petroff (1794-1867) is often remembered as the first great Russian chess master. He became the strongest player in Russia at the age of 15 and produced the first chess book in Russian. His main legacy, however, is the Petroff Defence (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nf6), an opening which has been seen consistently at the highest level ever since he invented it.

A new book, *The Petroff Move by Move* (Everyman Chess) by Cyrus Lakdawala, explores this opening in great detail. Due to the potentially symmetrical nature of the positions that can arise, the Petroff has an undeserved reputation as an unadventurous opening. The following dramatic encounter shows that this is far from the truth.

Caruana-Wang Hao: Bucharest 2013; Petroff

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 Nxe5 d6 4 Nf3 Nxe4 5 Nc3 Nxc3 6 dxc3 Be7 7 Be3 0-0 8 Qd2 b6 9 0-0-0 Bb7 10 Nd4 Nc6 11 Nf5 Bf6 12 Ng3 Ne7 13 Nh5 Nf5 14 Bf4 Be5 15 h4 A typical advance of the kingside pawns in the Petroff. 15 ... g6 16 Bd3 gxh5 A radical move. Black was obviously nervous about the line 16 ... Ng7 17 Nxg7 Bxg7 18 Rh2 and White's attack looks ominous. 17 Bxf5 Qf6 18 Bxe5 dxe5 19 Bd3 Kg7 20 Qe2 e4 Wang Hao activates his kingside pawn majority via a little tactical trick. 21 Bc4 Not 21 Bxe4 which hangs a piece to 21 ... Qf4+. 21 ... Qh6+ 22 Kb1 Rad8 23 a3 f5 Black's main trump in this position is that his majority can still produce a kingside passed pawn, while White's crippled majority on the other side effectively makes him down a pawn. Of course, White's promising attacking chances against Black's airedout king make up for this factor. 24 Bb3 Kg6 25 Rh3 f4 26 Rxd8 Rxd8 (see diagram 1) 27 g4 This is a serious slip. The computer finds the shocking 27 Rd3!! when one line is 27 ... Qf8 28 Bf7+!! (overloaded defender/deflection) 28 ... Kg7 (28 ... Kxf7?? 29 Qxh5+ Ke6 30 Qg4+ Ke7 31 Qg5+ and White wins) 29 Rxd8 Qxd8 30 Qxh5 and White is close to winning. 27 ... c5 28 Rh1 f3 29 Qc4 Instead, 29 gxh5+! Qxh5 30 Qe3 Kf6 31 Qf4+ Qf5 32 Qc7 Rd7 33 Qb8 looks better for White. 29 ... Bd5 30 Qa4 Bxb3 31 cxb3 Qf4 32 Re1 hxg4 33 Rxe4 Qf5 34 Ka2 Kh5 35 Re1 h6 36 Qxa7 g3 (see diagram 2) 37 fxg3 Now Black's f-pawn becomes too strong. After

Diagram 1

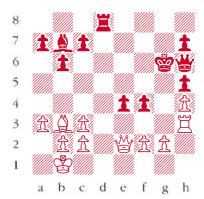
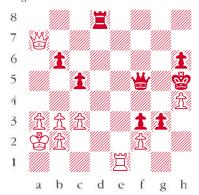


Diagram 2



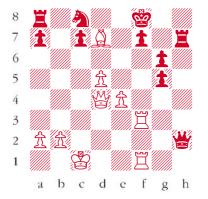
37 Qe7 and the game is even, e.g., 37 ... gxf2 38 Re5 Qxe5 39 Qxe5+ Kg4 40 Qe4+ Kg3 41 Qg6+ Kh2 42 Qc2 Kg1 43 Qg6+, and the game should end in a draw. 37 ... f2 38 Rf1 Kg4 Now the king helps the promotion of the pawn. 39 Qg7+ Kf3 40 g4 Qf4 41 Qb7+ Ke2 42 Rb1 Rd3 43 Qg2 Rd1 44 Rxd1 Kxd1 45 Qf1+ Kd2 The f-pawn will promote and White lacks a perpetual check mechanism. 46 g5 hxg5 47 hxg5 Qg3 48 Qb5 Qd3 White resigns

The British Championship is in progress in Warwick with last year's joint winners, David Howell and Jonathan Hawkins, both in attendance. *The Winning Move* features a fine finish by Howell from earlier in his career.

#### PUZZLE NO. 372

White to play. This position is from Howell-Sokolov, Staunton Memorial 2009. How can White finish off his attack with a fine flourish? Answers to me at The Spectator by Tuesday 4 August or via email to victoria@spectator.co.uk or by fax on 020 7681 3773. The winner will be the first correct answer out of a hat, and each week there is a prize of £20. Please include a postal address and allow six weeks for prize delivery.

Last week's solution 1 ... Rxh3+ Last week's winner Alan Andrews, Liverpool



## Competition

# Open and shut case

Lucy Vickery

In Competition No. 2908 you were invited to submit a comically appalling opening to an imaginary novel. Thanks are due to the inventor of the annual Bulwer-Lytton fiction contest from whom I have pinched the idea for this challenge (Edward Bulwer-Lytton is often described as 'the worst writer in history'). It was a pleasure to wade through your florid, convoluted prose, over-elaborate metaphors and inconsequential tangents. Dishonourable mentions go to Bill Greenwell for an opening composed entirely of hashtags and to C.J. Gleed. The best of the worst earn their authors £25 each. The bonus fiver is Edward Gilbert's.

Inspector Falcon Foot was an experienced murder investigator. He had seen it all in his long and distinguished career. This case felt very familiar. A body lay cold on the beach, barely a world-class javelin throw from the morning tides, which foamed softly like partially flat, inferior lemonade. Foot examined the corpse carefully. He could see that the man had not died peacefully in his sleep. Aside from the compression marks on the neck, the irises of the victim were like those of a Pacific chinook salmon that had swum up the Sacramento river, made it beyond Red Bluff but had expired from exhaustion before Battle Creek after numerous near-misses with natural predators (excluding the now-extinct Californian grizzly bear).

Foot lifted his handset and spoke to his colleague. 'Dead body,' he said, laconically. He clicked the receiver off. He raised his eyebrows resignedly, reflecting on the banality of evil. Edward Gilbert

In the globular archipelago that is trans-substantial love, there is always a provocative intifada. Had Sirenius the Spartan centurion realised how the fragments decoalesced, he might not have avoided the high road to Thermopylae, where all absolutes wilt like elderly brassica under ultraviolet. As the poetaster figured, θάνατος οὐδὲν διαφέρει τοῦ ζῆν. And then some. His emotional parsimony, a concatenation of parental influence and heliological dysfunction, left him as rutted as a semi-granular highway after the visitation of locusts that have been deprived of their favourite channel for months, and slaver like ferns. He was as weak as Lady Grey. Now, marching along the tedium of the B1756, as it later became, he was conscious only of gristle in his testicles, the way Life with a capital L had dealt him the seven of spades. And then, like a shaft of moonlight entering a Mexican silver mine, Gerda Roper

To the town of Y in the province of P in the country of K there came, on a night darker than the decades-locked interior of a subterranean Welsh dresser, a certain man Z, the lastborn son of G and (oddly) Marjorie, whose sole purpose it was to establish, in the name of the Tyrant of that era, the truth of rumours then circulating in the capital, Q, to the effect that the people of Y- always as underwhelmed by political initiatives as were literary critics upon reading Kazuo Ishiguro's The Unconsoled — had become able, by means of

a combination of an infusion of herbs rarer than exhibitionism in dormice and the repeated ostentatious bellowing of the word *dreikaiserbund*, to render themselves temporarily ineligible for jury service.

Adrian Fry

It was a dark night, though not really any darker than is normal in the northern hemisphere in winter, with some light drizzle but no hint of anything more inclement, and the clock had just struck midnight at the turn of the millennium, although it could, and indeed often had been argued that the millennium started, or would start, a year before or after this point, and the clock did not as a matter of fact strike midnight because clocks are unable to indicate whether it is midday or midnight, but just strike 12 times, besides which midnight had already passed an hour or two earlier in places like Bucharest or Tbilisi. Rodney, whose name was the most interesting thing about him, lay awake, letting his thoughts run, or rather, because he was very sleepy, walk slowly over the past day, which had in fact been more than usually uneventful. Brian Murdoch

Africa.

The fiery orb of the Sun rose over the savannah like an enormous spherical object that had been painted orange, assuming that it wasn't orange to begin with, on the end of an invisible stick. Not invisible in the sense of light beams actually bending around it, just hidden from view by the horizon. God it was dry there. Really dry. Really, really dry. You've never seen anywhere as dry as this was. Dry as a play on Radio 4. Dry as a bone nestling in a bed of silica gel (a common desiccant) and then placed in a low oven for a month. And that's pretty dry, let me tell you.

The lone gazelle that graced the promontory, looking for all the world like a dog with antlers and elongated legs, and a differently shaped face, and body, sniffed at the new dawn and farted majestically.

Rob Stuart

It was a morning of fiercely falling snow, of an indescribable coldness somewhat below freezing point, and of a whiteness which felt like blackness, so deep and depressing was it. The stealthy night, that had taken so much longer to pass than the hours which the sluggardly timepiece attempted to make us believe, had, during those hostile hours, emptied the waste-bin of the heavens and left a white detritus littering the once verdant landscape and reducing all transport to a sorry state of standstill on the now albescent streets and roadways. Almador, the corrupt and dwarfish Government Minister - for it is he who is to be the admirable hero of this tale - limped nimbly towards the window of his chamber and scratched the talons of his nails down the icy filigree on the panes, cursing under his stale breath in his incomprehensible, tasteless native tongue. Alanna Blake

#### NO. 2911: TRIPLE THRILL

@JonnyGeller shared this 'Thriller Pitch in Three Texts' on his Twitter feed: 'Hi Babe, what are you doing?'/ 'Nothing much, 'em really tired. Just going to sleep now babe. And you?'/ 'In the club standing behind you'. You are invited to submit a thriller in three text messages. Email entries (50 words max.) to lucy@spectator.co.uk by midday on 12 August.

# Crossword 2222: Exquisite by Columba

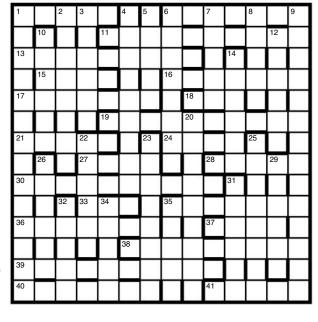
One unclued light (hyphened) is a 38 of a word hidden in the grid. Two unclued lights are definitions of the hidden word, which is also the surname of a former 11 of 25 (two words), whose first name is an unclued light. The hidden word and its 38 — both starting in an appropriate square, and together forming a 38 relevant to the puzzle — must be highlighted.

#### Across

- 6 Divisions in Mississippi led by force aboard steamer (7)
- Part screened by sign, a certain slender type (9)
- 15 Steep southern wood (4)
- Cue card oddly came as a product (7)
- 18 Cross Australia westward, going around Perth finally(3)
- 19 Group of stars rested with band repelled by attention (10, two words)
- 21 Love of fine arts, bug endlessly consuming time (5)
- 24 Spot store's latest pasta (4)
- 27 Work nut loose (4)
- 28 Hold gross reptile (5)
- 30 Stories about doctor operating mostly in stretches? (10)
- 33 Piece of advice in extremity (3)
- 35 Hunter in routine period (7)
- 36 Film covering search for bone (7)
- 37 Man leaves seat to get oil (4)
- 39 Irritable knight, ardent, missing maiden (10)
- missing maiden (10) 40 Test nag, terribly laden (7)
- 41 Class for example rejected by students (5)

#### Down

1 Growing inclined to restrict mischievous child on day before vigil? (14, hyphened)



- 2 Promises to work for taskmasters? (8)
- 3 Desert plant in Egypt surrounded by divine incarnation (6)
- 4 Are ceremonies disrupted by native fire-raisers? (9)
- 5 Rebuke soprano without passion (5)
- 6 Quiet, confused about officer being sentimental (8)
- 7 Hook knocked about hard (5)
- 9 Wrenches ragged drapes covered with flies (14, two words)
- 10 Umbellifer among mosses eliminated (6)
- 12 Love, strange, alas not reciprocated (6, hyphened)
- 14 Plunder inside according to investigator (6)
- 20 Sticky around muscle before removal of fatty tissue (9)
- 23 Production price sadly is not cut (8, two words)
- 26 Enter church after support (6)
- Busybodies turning up in courts (6)
- 31 Stick machine on base (6)
- 32 Baron makes public attacks (5)

- 34 Translation of Bible necessary to limit alarm (5)
- 35 Meat, not good for sheep (5)

A first prize of £30 for the first correct solution opened on 17 August. There are two runners-up prizes of £20. (UK solvers can choose to receive the latest edition of the Chambers Dictionary instead of cash—ring the word 'Dictionary'.) Entries to: Crossword 2222, The Spectator, 22 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HP. Please allow six weeks for prize delivery.

Address
Email

Name

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#### **SOLUTION TO 2219: KEEP GOING**

Unclued lights complete the titles of Carry On films.

First prize Tony Hankey, London W4 Runners-up Mark Roberts, Hostert, Luxembourg; Tony Dew, London SW13

# Status Anxiety Trouble with the neighbours Toby Young

few years ago, I got a bit fed up with receiving Christmas cards from my friends designed to show off just how well they were doing. A typical card consisted of five or six blond children on ponies or quad bikes with a massive country house in the background. The caption would be something like: 'Greetings from Shropshire.'

So I came up with an idea. Why not create my own version? I'd get my four children to strike a variety of delinquent poses. One would be outside OPR stadium, fag in mouth and can of beer in hand. Another would be doing an impression of Lord Coke with a rolled-up £10 note sticking out of his nose. My daughter would be pushing a double buggy containing two snotty babies and sporting a Croydon facelift. This is when they were all aged eight and under, which would have added to the joke. The caption would have read: 'Greetings from Acton.'

I didn't do it in the end, partly because I haven't ruled out standing as the Tory candidate in Ealing Central and Acton. It's exactly the sort of thing that would be reproduced on a leaflet by the sitting Labour MP, illustrating just what a heartless Tory bastard I am. But I was reminded of it earlier this week when I got a round



This is the second time someone has been murdered a few feet from my home

robin email from the chair of the local residents' association about a murder that had taken place on the corner of our road.

It happened at one of the local 'supported living' facilities dotted around the area. These cater to people that the council describes as 'vulnerable', although when you spot one of them at night, loitering at the steps of the unlit footbridge at the end of my street, that isn't the first word that springs to mind.

In this case, the victim wasn't a 'vulnerable' individual, but one of the staff employed to look after them. She was discovered dead at 6.40 a.m. on Monday and, shortly before that, a resident had absconded from the hostel. He was described as a white man of heavy build who suffers from schizophrenia. The email quoted Detective Chief Inspector Partridge, of the Homicide and Major Crime Command, cautioning against any heroics: 'I would urge anyone who sees him to contact the police immediately and not approach him.' No danger of that, chief inspector!

This is the second time someone has been murdered a few feet from my home. I suppose it's fairly common if you live in London — or, indeed, any large city, although the murder rate in England as a whole is declining. According to the Office of National Statistics, there were 537 homicides in 2013-14, down from 1,041 in 2002-03. Earlier this year, some friends of mine, driving along the Caledonian Road with their four children, actually witnessed a murder. At least my children have been spared that.

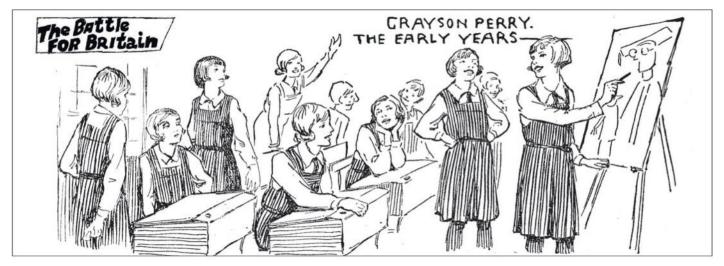
Is it a reason to move to the country? I thought about getting out of Dodge after my eldest son was mugged outside our house at the age of six. He had set up a little trestle table and was selling glasses of lemonade at 50p a pop, when a couple of teenage boys cycled past and swiped the Tupperware box he was keeping his money in. He didn't seem all that bothered by it, partly because I agreed to reimburse him, but also because he'd already 'priced in' the moral depravity of his fellow citizens, having already spent six years in Acton

If you take a Catholic view of human nature, as I do, and believe we're all sinners of one kind or another, then it's no bad thing for your children to be exposed to man's wickedness at an early age. It's all very well wanting to preserve their innocence, but encouraging them to think that all human beings are fundamentally good is bad parenting. In the long run, it's more likely to get them into trouble than bringing them up in the city.

On the other hand, that doesn't mean I'm relaxed about being next door to an 'assisted living' facility. I'm not a complete nimby about this sort of thing, but I hope Ealing Council is going to explain to the local community how this murder suspect came to be placed by them in the middle of a residential area. And I hope they're going to reassure us that they'll vet these 'vulnerable' people more carefully in future.

Toby Young is associate editor of The Spectator.

#### MICHAEL HEATH



#### The Wiki Man

## Let's pay for the BBC content we use Rory Sutherland

hat follows is a proposal for reducing the BBC licence fee and improving the corporation's output while saving the British newspaper industry.

All that's involved is a basic understanding of pricing psychology combined with a digital currency for micropayments. Under my proposals, half the licence fee would fund the BBC's Reithian purpose; the other £60 could be paid direct to the BBC as now or, if you chose, paid to you as a digital currency (6,000 Beebcoins). People could buy additional Beebcoins, which could be spent on BBC or competitor content — including content from newspapers. Notionally the BBC would lose out; in practice they would gain revenue, as they could now sell premium services. When people can choose what they buy, they buy more and pay more.

A simple fact: people hate paying for things they don't want. Nothing remarkable there, except people especially hate paying for things they don't want bundled with things they do want. One behavioural experiment



When people can choose what they buy, they buy more and pay more

asked people what they would pay for three attractive pens; the average was about \$30. But offer the same three nice pens with one crappy pen added and the amount people pay falls. I know, I know - it's illogical. Why not throw the crappy pen away? But that's not how we think. People who'd pay £10 a month just for Radio 4 resent the licence fee because they don't like Graham Norton.

I'd pay £1 to read any article by John Kay, but can't bring myself to subscribe to the FT because I'd have to pay for pages of guff on the 'Central Bank crisis in Ecuador'; I won't subscribe to the New York Times because, as a Brit, I refuse to pay for articles about the 'knife-edge gubernatorial race in Iowa'. If I could buy articles one at a time, I'd pay a lot.

In a nutshell, people spend more when they feel they can direct their spending. Millions of people would not have a mobile phone if there were no pay-as-you-go option. People would never go to Starbucks if they were billed annually.

Starbucks makes money because it ingeniously offers people something costing £2.30 at a place and time when people are in the mood to spend £2.30. Create a payment mechanism where the BBC (and The Spectator and the Guardian) can microcharge, and you capture far more consumer surplus. 'Viewers can wait a week to watch the concluding episode of Unfeasibly Attractive Forensic Scientists, or pay 199 Beebcoins and watch it now.' Ker-ching! 'This week's Rod Liddle Uncut is available for 40 Beebcoins.' Ker-ching!

I once spent £35 taking my daughter and friend to a premiere of *Doctor* Who at a multiplex cinema. Halfway there she admitted that the same episode was being shown concurrently on BBC1. ('What if I buy a £10 ticket to Screen 2?' I asked. 'Can I watch Newsnight?') I had spent 25 per cent of the annual licence fee on a single programme. It goes to show that if you want to grow a market, you need to practise what economists call 'price discrimination'. One-size-fits-all charging kills your ability to charge. Hollywood sells the same film seven times over at different price points. The low-cost airlines survive on the sale of add-ons.

Charging in this way also helps niche content - chasing a small passionate audience rather than a



large homogeneous one. Credit cards are fine if you're buying a film for £10, but not for a newspaper article for 10p or a TV programme for 50p. The technology to microcharge already exists (my bitcoin address is in the QR code above, if you want to send me 1p). What's missing is the critical mass.

Rory Sutherland is vice-chairman of Ogilvy Group UK.

#### **DEAR MARY** YOUR PROBLEMS SOLVED



Q. I have learned that someone I much admired in youth is about to become single again. I only have the sketchiest details but am single myself and keen to know more. The one person who knows everyone and would know everything is a valued and highly amusing friend of mine, but she is also massively indiscreet and interfering. How can I find out more without arousing her suspicions re my own interest? Were she to guess it she would overplay my hand for me.

- Name and address withheld

A. Look around for a newly single man of your own vintage, then mention to your gossipy friend that he seems depressed but you are not sure why. Say no more. She will start speculating and conclude that the man is in need of a partner. Unprompted by you, who can sit back yawning, she will then run through the names of all emerging singletons supplying details of their personalities and circumstances. Once you have the information you need, throw her off the scent by asking for fuller details of another candidate.

Q. My daughter-in-law is in the habit of asking me to do some shopping or to collect prescriptions for her while she looks after her infant children. Occasionally she has asked me about the cost of items and then paid me. But on the last

occasion, after I had collected a prescription for her, she asked, but then did not offer to pay. What do I say, without giving offence, to remind her that she owes me money?

R.S., Southsea, Hants

A. Next time you hand over the shopping, say cheerily, 'Don't pay me now. Let's wait till it gets to a round figure, say £30, that's about the limit of my spare cash flow, and you can pay me back all at once. I will remind you.'

Q. A commemorative luncheon in our village will be attended by, among 30 others, my wife and three ladies with whom I have had affairs over the past 25 years. Should I keep them separate or dare I have them together at the top table which I am hosting?

- Name and address withheld

A. It would be good for the women were you to place them all at the same table, Monty Python-style. You will help them to realise that although they were silly to have fallen for a serial philanderer, he was at least a popular choice. In this way you can transform their tragedies into comedy.

Q. May I pass on a tip to readers? My husband and I need to spend a night in Oxford this weekend as he is finally receiving his degree. I left it too late to book a hotel but elation followed despair when I found the website www. universityrooms.com. We have booked a double ensuite quadfacing at Keble College for £95, and a single for our son at £65.

- A.O., Suffolk

A. How kind of you to share this useful information.

# Drink Young guns Bruce Anderson



he Honourable Society of Odd Bottles began proceedings with a report on the activities of our junior branch. These youngsters are not yet eligible to become drinking members, but they are chosen because of their unremitting hostility to vermin and their burgeoning enthusiasm for killing game.

Young Charlie, the Nimrod of his generation, has been prodigiously active. It is surprising that there is a single grey squirrel still alive in Somerset. Any rat that comes his way goes no further. He is also mightily effective against rabbits and pigeons, which he enjoys scoffing, after he has skinned or plucked them. Charlie has inherited a .410: the fifth generation of his family to use it. It is a notoriously fickle calibre, the excuse I always use when I miss with one. To kill, you have to be dead-eye accurate, which Charlie is. It may help that the gun is a Purdey, a beautiful piece of kit. Craftsmanship in the service of sport, a poetic fusion of aesthetics and weapon-hood, cherished over the decades; this is not just a shotgun. It is a piece of England.

It is surprising that there is a single grey squirrel still alive in Somerset

Florence, his intended bride, cannot wait for the stalking season and her visits to the gun room. Her parents are postponing the tearful moment when they will have to break the news. At the age of six, she is too young to shoot a stag. But she has wielded an air pistol with joyous success, though so far only against a target. There will be rapid promotion: vermin beware. Her mother, a toothsome little minx who looks too tiny to handle a gun, is rapidly emerging as one of the best female game-shots in the country — and not just female. It will not be long before the rivalry of mother and daughter re-echoes from moor to forest.

We moved on to military matters. One of our number served in a Guards regiment. Returning to barracks one night, he heard a noise coming from the parade ground. Investigating, he found one of his guardsman running round the square, holding his



'He's the last Frenchman to win the Tour de France
— taken from the original Daguerreotype.'

mattress above his head, repeating, 'I pissed my bed.' The sergeant supervising the punishment confirmed that the said guardsman had indeed been undisciplined in micturation, and had been atoning for it throughout the day, when not required for other duties. The Bottle sent everyone to bed and in the morning, the sergeant got a rocket from the CO, who told him that you cannot do that sort of thing in today's army. (Why not?) It was unclear whether regimental public opinion was on the colonel's side. For the rest of his army career, the unfortunate laddie was known as

We accompanied our deliberations with a selection of wines. Two stood out, the first from New Zealand. In recent years, that admirable colony has been playing better and better cricket while making better and better wines, especially Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. We drank a Kumeu River Estate Chardonnay, 2012, which could have stood comparison to a Puligny or a Chassagne. Beautifully made — butter, honey, hay, flint: full and succulent, but also crisp and incisive — it was barely ready for drinking and will keep. Farr Vintners are charging under £20 a bottle. That is a bargain.

For red, we stuck to Pomerol: the 2000 Vray Croix de Gay. This is a true Pomerol, mostly Merlot, some Cabernet Franc, no Cabernet Sauvignon, but for all that disciplined and harmonious. The bad news is that it is a small property which is becoming increasingly well-known. No bargains here. The Bottles adjourned: next meeting in the Highlands, with a columnar report to follow.

#### MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

#### I love it that you...

I had never heard the Country (Red Dirt) singer Wade Bowen before, although his latest album *Hold my Beer (Vol 1)* has already sold 14,000 copies. On an earlier album, he provided textbook examples of two constructions that I find increasingly annoying, and one that seems fine.

'I love it that you're my girl,' sang Wade. 'I love that I'm your man.' I didn't care for either of those declarations one bit. 'I love it when you take my hand,' he added. I didn't mind that at all.

This business of *I love* that... is on the rise. I heard Fi Glover say it on Radio 4,



and someone in one of those rather unsatisfactory internet discussions about grammar wrote, quite spontaneously: 'Jane, I love that you mention how English is a living language.'

You and I, I take it, would say, 'Jane, I love you mentioning', or, if we felt that *mentioning* was a good, solid, beefy gerund, we might make it, 'Jane, I love your mentioning'. Thus we'd reach for a noun or the equivalent

as the object of the verb *love*. 'Beggars love brawling,' And wretches love wrawling,' as it says in *A Mery and Pleasant Prognostication*, a book from the 1570s which doesn't sound all that mery. An alternative would be to make the object of *love* an infinitive: Beggars love to brawl.

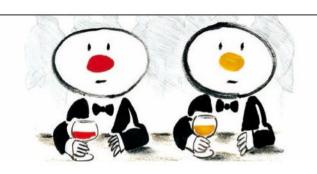
This same appetite for a noun or pronoun as object for the verb *love* gives rise to Mr Bowen's alternative: 'I love it that you're my girl.' This is halfway to orthodoxy, for it is quite idiomatic to say: 'I love it when you smile.' Another way of supplying a noun as object is to

insert *the fact*: 'I love the fact that you're my girl.'

The use of a 'that' clause as an object is, I must admit, recorded by the Oxford English Dictionary from the 18th century. The earliest example smells foreign: 'I love that Erastus should thus love me.' It translates Molière's 'aimé-je fort qu'Éraste m'aime.' In the 21st century the construction has become part of a native speaker's repertoire. Foreign students of English are assured that it is valid. Perhaps it is becoming so, but it makes me squirm.

- Dot Wordsworth





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